

**RETRO
RAMPAGE
WREKED!**

///ZK SPECTRUM///

"IT LIVES!!!"

**OH
THE
HUMANITY!**



CAPTAIN'S BLOG: FINAL ENTRY?

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"OUT OF THIS WORLD" ARTWORK BY LISA WOODWORTH!

Program: INTRODUCTION

It all began in March 2022. I had the undoubted honour of getting my letter printed in the new incarnation of CRASH magazine, issue 8. I was suggesting they could start a regular feature looking at some of the games which came out in the many years between the Spectrum's commercial demise up to when new Crash had started up again. Good old Lloyd Mangram agreed it was a sound idea, so it was lovely to receive validation from a boyhood hero of mine.

But then something happened. Nothing. Maybe they had enough to eat already on their Speccy plates, but I saw no evidence of my suggestion being implemented. So, I thought, maybe I should do it myself. My mate Dave had started his own Spectrum blog, and he reckoned I should start one too. This sounded like a good opportunity to do something fun and historic. Well maybe.

So I set something up on Google Sites, a handy free service for the technically ignorant like myself. And it looked alright, thanks in no small part to my missus' fancy artwork. The only downside was the format. It scrolled down endlessly on one page in a rather user-unfriendly manner. But it caught Clive Townsend's attention, so it can't have worked too badly.

Quite surprisingly the reviews kept on a-coming, and I churned out five separate 'chapters' in this format before changing over to Wix's site, which offered me the chance to change format to a more traditional blog set-up. It looked and worked better, so that was nice, and I've stuck with it ever since. The main focus was always to try to highlight the unknown, the unheralded, the unreviewed, the unloved... To try to stand out from the status quo. Down, down, deeper and down into the murky depths of the Spectral cesspool. So to speak.

Talking of downs, there have certainly been ups and downs over the last three and a bit years. Naively I thought it would start off small, then grow exponentially. But it's been a lot more erratic than all that. Trying to publicise a Spectrum blog site has often been frustrating. I've got an impressive 388 followers on Facebook, yet when I post anything at all, it reaches approximately 2 or 3 people. Twitter was a bust too, except for when the excellent Shaw Brothers championed my review of two of their games. Otherwise, zip. On the positive side, a shout-out now to The Laird of YouTube fame, whose kind reviews of my various PDF books have been a real high point, and

the sort of thing that makes it all worthwhile. But what would you call it when your posts create little interest, and yet you still don't get the message that no-one's interested! How dumb can you be? Put it down to mental illness probably.

Still, the power of stubbornness and spite cannot be underestimated, so on I go! I've always thought that the written word is an important thing, even if we're discussing subjects as relatively trivial as ancient computer games. How many videos or social media posts about gaming will be remembered or can even be viewed again in ten years' time? I was keen to do something that sticks. A thing you can keep for posterity, even something people can look at when you've carked it, so the memory of your unwanted opinions and awful punning can live on forever...

With that in mind, I've always enjoyed making these PDF books, and this particular one is a doozy. It's a long read to be fair, so for those not comfortable with the lost art of reading something over a paragraph long, tough times are ahead for you! It's not like you have to do it all in one go though, feel free to dip in and out as you choose. I've tried to inject as much fun and useful information into it as I can, so you don't get too sleepy.

So if you do happen to enjoy "ZX Spectrum – It Lives: Captain's Blog: Final Entry?" with its catchy over-punctuated title, please do comment to that effect, as it really is nice to get some feedback sometimes. I'm offering it free so if you download it, maybe exercise good manners and say "thanks bud" like your mama taught you? After all, it's only taken me months on end to re-format every single page from my site, no biggie!

I've abused you enough now, it's time for you to hopefully enjoy this fabulously free PDF book. Regarding the title, this space cadet is quite probably nearing the end of his Spectral voyage soon after a lengthy spell stuck out in the cosmos, but hopefully this won't turn out to be his "final entry" just yet...

Al

R Tape loading error, 0:1





Great pic, despite the blue fingernails

*Oh Mummy! Vick's got two to care for
him here*



*Vick's got a knife ("That's not a knife!")
and one of the mummies has got himself
stuck*

*Pyramid 4's busy. Vick digs a hole so he
can have a pee*



KING'S VALLEY

(Retroworks, 2009) &

SHOVEL ADVENTURE

(Pat Morita Team, 2021)

I'm doing these two games as a job lot, since they have a Pharaoh amount in common. "Tut tut" I hear you say, "What an ankh-er!" But fear not, this [Raider Of The Lost Ark](#), sorry, [Art Of Reviewing](#) will do what he can to give both these titles a decent burial.

Oldest title first | sphinx. [King's Valley](#) was made by Konami for the MSX in 1985. The only instructions I could 'dig up' are in Spanish. Better than Egyptian at least. You play Vick Vaporub, a famous explorer from Manchester, that hotbed of archaeological studies, in search of fortune and glory (*kid*) in King's Valley, Egypt, east of Java.

You must find jewels, avoiding mummies naturally, who you can lob rubber knives at, and use the many pickaxes lying around to reach any tricky spots and defile the place generally. Quite often the tombs consist of multiple screens, so getting the scrolls is a grim reality. Best to use some (em)balm for that I reckon.

This is some cracking arcadey fare right here, well worth its weight in gems. It reminds me a little of the ancient Ocean title [Gilligan's Gold](#), except this game isn't impossibly finicky, which kinda ruined that one. The game looks and sounds the business, nice tune too, and each tomb presents a different challenge, thus giving some decent longevity. Which is nice.



*The title kinda kills this otherwise
exciting scene*

*Grab the gem or nobble the mummy?
Decisions, decisions*



AFTER HARD WORKING, JOHNNY PALAS
MADE A GREAT DISCOVERY, A SECRET
ENTRANCE TO THE LHOHA FLOWERS
PHARAOH CHAMBER...

*Hope Johnny's john is more friendly than
Miner Willy's*

*"Snakes... I hate snakes..." Not keen on
mummies neither...*



So now onto the unexcitingly named **Shovel Adventure** which is a convo of an old Amstrad game this time. Where do they dig these up from? Your less silly name this time round is Johnny Pallas, a legendary explorer from Urethra. Ah sorry, that should be Utrera. Wherever the heck that is. You've discovered the secret entrance to the Pharaom Lohla Flowers' chamber apparently. But you must collect all the gems in all the chambers in between to open up the connecting doors. Before that guy from Manchester gets there first.

Each chamber has mounds of sand handily placed where you have to dig to find all them there jewels. And you can dig a hole anywhere you like to trap a mummy, then fill it in again for lols. It's a bit like **Panic** really, just from a different angle. Get all the gems in a room, then a garish magenta ankh appears as if by magic. Grab that and make good your escape.

This is a nice little jaunt. Presentation is great, with a good intro setting the scene, then the game is neat with good graphics and music, and plays well too. But now for the crunch - which of these games sits at the top of the pyramid? I think King's Valley's gameplay variety just about clinches it in its favour, but both of these are spendid expeditions if you fancy a go at being Indy... or Lara... or Nate... or Fred... or **Rick Dangerous**... or *(fades out)*

THE VERDICT

KING'S VALLEY

88%

SHOVEL ADVENTURE

86%



Two modern ancient games here which are well worth dusting off and exploring. And I'm not even being my usual sarcophagus self when I say that. *Taxi for A!*

STAINLESS STEEL

(Mikrogen. 1986) &

MARAUDER

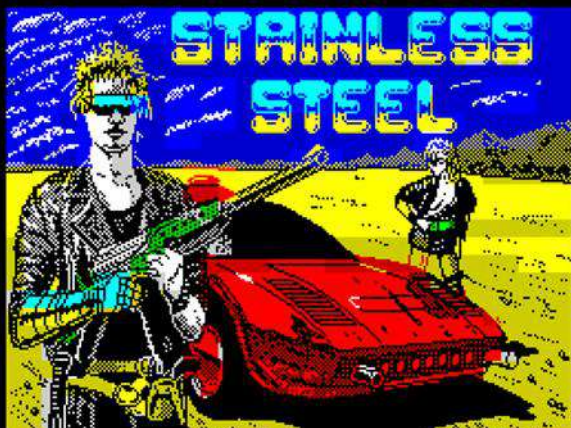
(Hewson Consultants. 1988)

Spy Hunter caused quite a stir when it escaped from the arcades in 1985 and landed very successfully on home computers. The Speccy version was a big hit, hugely playable with neat graphics and a pleasing variety of gameplay for a car (and boat) racing game.

Mikrogen thought they'd do their own variant, with a fairly silly name, the following year. Even the load screen is reminiscent of the U.S. Gold title, and also of the *Fighting Fantasy* book **Freeway Fighter**. Although to be fair, 1985 also saw the release of **Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome**, so they may all owe a debt to Tina Turner and pals. Isn't it time we all got beyond the Thunderdome by now?

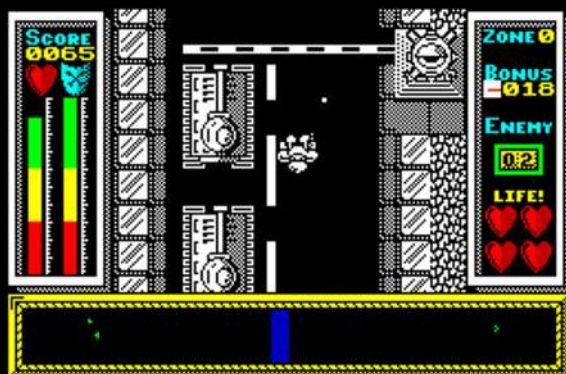
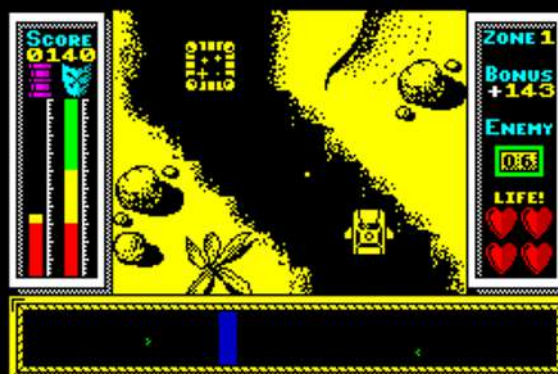
Actually **Stainless Steel** is only half like Spy Hunter. Disappointingly when you start out, assuming you've made it through the rather painful front screen AY music, you're stuck with ol' Shanks' pony. You have to stumble around with your oversized machine gun, taking out helicopters and angry twirly bots while dodging the invisible bullets. It's rock hard and I don't care for it much. Your radar helps a small amount but even so... *urgh*.

If you somehow get through it (*save scumming, yes*) then the game 'proper' can begin. You've got a cute little auto with wings to pilot, shooting helis again and avoiding missiles and angry flashy squares this time. It's faster, so funner, but again rather tough and not exactly Playability City. I got to the end, but there was only a big wall to crash into. I must have missed a heli or a square...
NEXT!



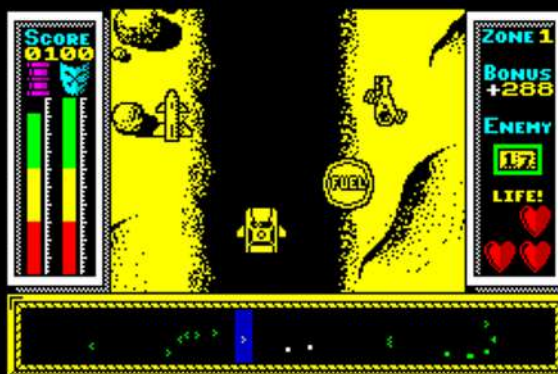
In the post-apocalypse, bras are hard to shop for

Flashy square is angry and spits bullets at you



Radar shows I've cleared most of Zone Zero. "What a guy..."

Fuel. Helicopter. Missile. Death



Now onto **Marauder**, a well-received but rarely mentioned Hewson offering from two years later. Alright, it's not massively similar to Spy Hunter and Stainless Steel, but it has a shooty vehicle and scrolls uphill, and I just fancied playing it. *"It's my website and I'll be random if I want to".*

Wow, this is so forgiving after stumbling through Stainless Steel. You can make progress without being shredded every few seconds. Your Mad Max Mobile is pretty slow actually, this is no speedfest. You edge your way northwards, taking out enemy gun placements and tanks. It's quite sedate really, but the enemies are darn good shots, so you must keep moving. Especially since if you stay still for 5 seconds or so, an air strike comes over and flames you.

One somewhat leftfield feature is that now and then you can shoot flashy towers, which bestow upon you a random boon or... anti-boon. Yes, you can improve your shields, gain a smart bomb or an extra life, but more often than not you tend to end up losing a life (*not cool*) or having your controls reversed (*soooo annoying*). I generally leave them well alone as they clearly hate me.

I've managed to blag my way through the first two levels, but stage three is quite the biyatch. Straight after you start, three nasties come and take you from behind, as well as there being mucho gunfire from in front. It's impossibubble. Apparently you need lots of smart bombs. I had one. **GAME OVER!**

But up to that point it's a lorra fun. There's a cracking AY tune, taking the Sisters Of Mercy's doomy **Afterhours** and messing with it quite... unmercifully. And it's all graphically smooth and colourful, with well-placed checkpoints, and is quite addictive. So in this battle of the post-apocalyptic blasters, it pretty much blows Mikrogen's contender into the weeds.

POST-APOCALYPTIC POINTS SCORE

STAINLESS STEEL

72%



MARAUDER

86%





Pyoom. pyoom! Nice screen, but the game really isn't this fast

Things get a little hectic at the end of stage one



level 2 and a nice drive on the beach is ruined by a sudden airstrike

The evil start of level 3. Forget about it!





Quite a cool screen, even if their ball's a bit mis-shapen. Ouch

Kick-off time. Where's the ball?



Hopefully any future upgraded version of this game might improve this pic slightly

A goal gets a slo-mo replay with classic old skool flashing 'R'



SPECCY SOCCER: COMMUNITY

EDITION

(VOXEL TOWER, 2023)

This is nice to see. There's not many that would be brave enough to attempt a footy game on the Spectrum in this day and age. It'd take something to top the **FIFA** steamroller surely, not to mention the 5,826,021 other such games there have been since the Speccy took a far from early bath.

"In my day" the togger game of choice was probably **Match Day II**. And its predecessor naturally, but for me those chubby little fellows with their deflecty diamonds were as good as it got back then. Sorry, I didn't stick around for Emlyn Hughes or Kick-Off, or even Sensible Soccer in the PC age.

This game is apparently much like Sensible Soccer in its top-down view from the Goodyear blimp. The nefarious-sounding **Voxel Tower** were also behind Space Racing, which I couldn't quite get my head around. Would I fare better with Speccy Soccer? Couldn't do a great deal worse *Shirley...*

You sort out your keys and options, pick a friendly or cup competition, choose your fave Spanish team, even if you haven't got one, then off you kick! Then the action starts thick and fast. Your little ants dart around the place in desperate search of the magic black pixel, hoping to propel it towards your opponent's mesh type thing (*"Net" - Ed.*) Ooh, it's exhilarating!

I'm being facetious but the game really does move pretty quickly. Your main problem is differentiating your guys from their guys, one in black and one in slightly lighter black. You have to go by instinct largely, but can you imagine the clashing if actual colours were used. Oh the humanity!



*You can choose your formation.
Wish I knew which one worked*

*Hernandez winds up a long throw a la
Dave Challinor of Tranmere Rovers*



*The tale of a rather boring half. At
least I've still got 11 men for once*

*"You're off! For being married to
Shakira"*



Most of footy's features are here. Fouls, penalties, free kicks, corners, throw-ins, referee, hooligans, streakers. You certainly can't say the authors haven't tried. There's even a cracking beepy tune playing throughout the game, and it's not **Match Of The Bleedin' Day!** Kudos. Although it might be the Spanish Matcho del Dia, I dunno.

So lots of good stuff, now for the bad stuff. It's very tricky. There's a skill level option, but where do you go when you're struggling on level one? It took me A LOT of games before I managed to score, and I still haven't won a game. I know I'm cr@p but even so. Also, I can confirm that *"the referee's a w***er"* as he delights in sending your players off left, right and centre just for being ugly. Surely a red should be for 2 yellows by the same player, but no. As such, tackling is a massively risky business and best avoided.

Controlling your passing also seems quite hap(*Eden*)hazard and generally there's a slight feeling that this type of game might be a bit much for El Specco. But I wonder if the mighty Voxel Tower Of Mordor might some time release an upgraded version, with the difficulty level turned down somewhat. That might well turn out to be unbelievable, Jeff.

THE VERDICT

SPECCY SOCCER

88%



It's better than **World Cup Carnival**, but not as good as I.S.S., since it won't let you be Lake District United. It's better than Liverpool have been last season, but not as good as Luton Town. It's smarter than Harry Maguire, but... (*"Right, red card, yer off!!"* - referee A. Barstad)

RUN BABY RUN & THE WILD BUNCH

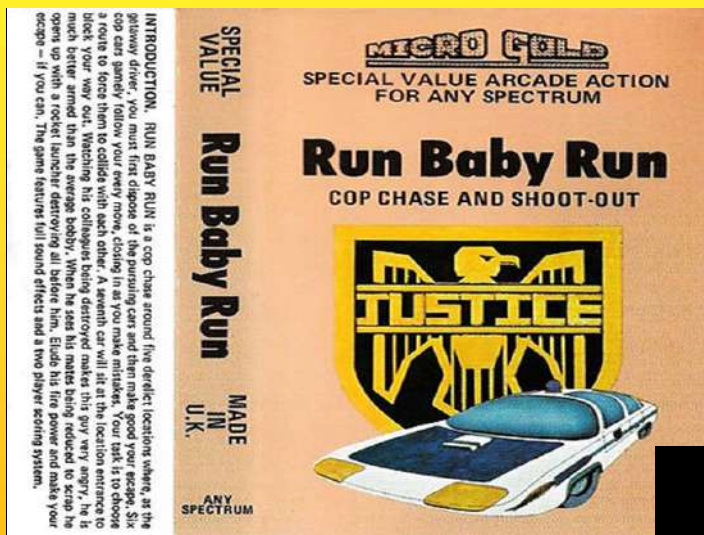
(Firebird, 1984)

A couple of early **Firebird** titles here, both of which I bought with my not at all hard-earned pocket money back in '84. £1.99 was a big deal when you were only 11, so you wanted a bit of entertainment at the very least for your half pennies. But you were by no means guaranteed it, as for every decent budget title there must have been a few duffers. Doing your research was key, scanning the mags diligently. But these two games didn't get many reviews, so were a bit of a punt.

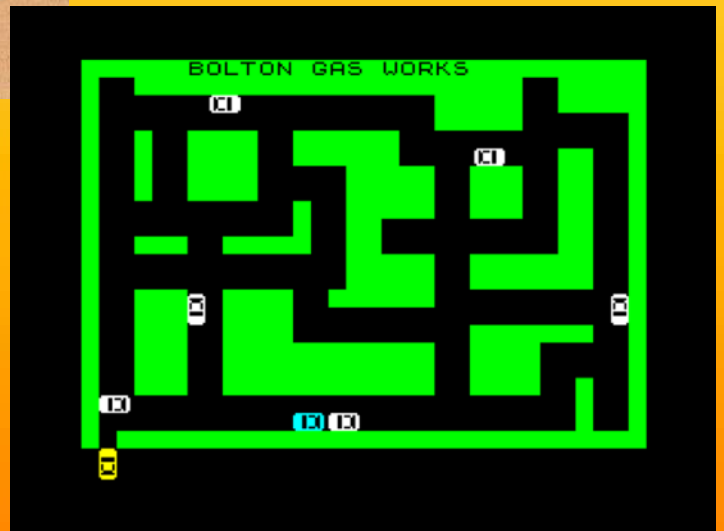
First **Run Baby Run**, which Tony Rainbird of Race Ace '*fame*' wrote and released under his own Microgold banner in 1983, then sold to Tony Firebird, his brother a year later. Race Ace of course ended up on **Don't Buy This!** and deservedly so. I reviewed it in Part 1 many moons ago and the pain still lingers.

In this game you're on the run from the rozzers. No idea why, you might be a granny murderer for all we know, but it seems you did something really rather naughty judging by the **Blues Brothers**-esque number of cop cars that end up chasing you. Well 7 anyway, which is enough, believe me.

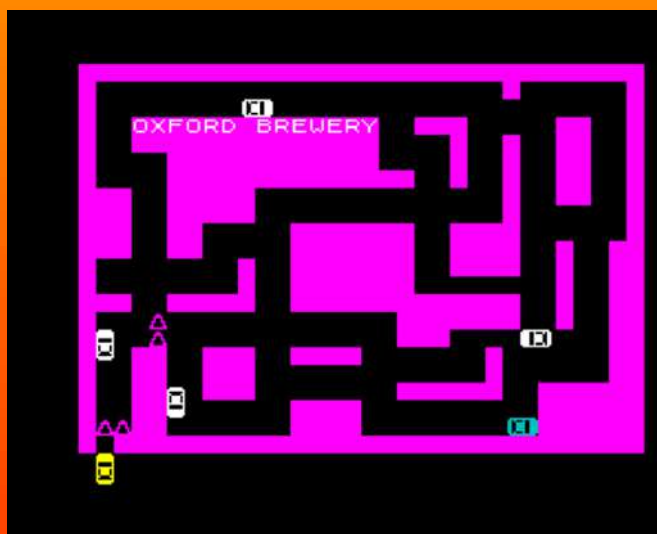
Your escape route is a long one which takes in some of the UK's most exotic locations. Bolton Gasworks, Oxford Brewery, Huddersfield Foundry - they're all here. In short, the cop cars trace your exact route (*they had great training*), gullible fools that they are, so you have to weave your way through the streets in such a way that they cross paths and take each other out. Easier said than done, and the last guy, the yella fella, has a rocket launcher to aim at you once you've dispatched his six colleagues. Pretty extreme.



This future cop car is flat, baby, flat



Duke Nukem waits patiently in the yellow car with his RPG while his white minions do his bidding



Those magenta cones are car wrecks. A brewery should be treated with more respect

Things get hairy when you forget what route you've taken and you're stuck in amongst the cops



This could be rubbish (*cough*, *Race Ace*) but you know what, it's good simple fun. The cars zip along at quite a pace and slowly get faster, meaning you really have to keep a keen eye on where *you're* going and where *they're* all going all at once. It all gets pretty frenzied and kinda exciting. Well done Tony, we knew you had it in you!

A change of pace now and it's Wild West time again in *The Wild Bunch*. By Kevin Smith, but not the Clerks guy, who also did K-Tel's It's Only Rock 'N' Roll. Well never mind. In this one you're a cowboy, on a steel horse you ride, and you're wanted dead or alive. Mama, you just killed a man, put a gun against his head, pulled the trigger, now he's dead. Only you didn't do it, but everyone thinks you did. Quite the bind.

So you're on the run from the law again, with a Pinkerton agent after you, roaming from town to town, trying to track down the rootin' tootin' good ol' boy who actually did the darn deed. You can buy supplies from stores, play poker in the saloon, check the telegrams, have a shoot-out in the street, the full *Westworld* experience.

It's a bitza game, this. A bit of adventuring, as when you walk from town to town you must choose to fight, bribe or run from assailants. A bit of strategy as you plan the best route to hunt down the murderer while avoiding the fuzz. A bit of card playing, with quite an enjoyable poker game. And a bit of arcade action if you end up in a shoot-out.

And each of these bits are not half bad in themselves, but together they make for quite a unique experience overall, and very good value for a budget game. Visuals are good and varied, sound is well used, and no two games tend to be the same. What more could you ask for a mere 398 half pennies?

THE VERDICT

RUN BABY RUN

72%

THE WILD BUNCH

75%





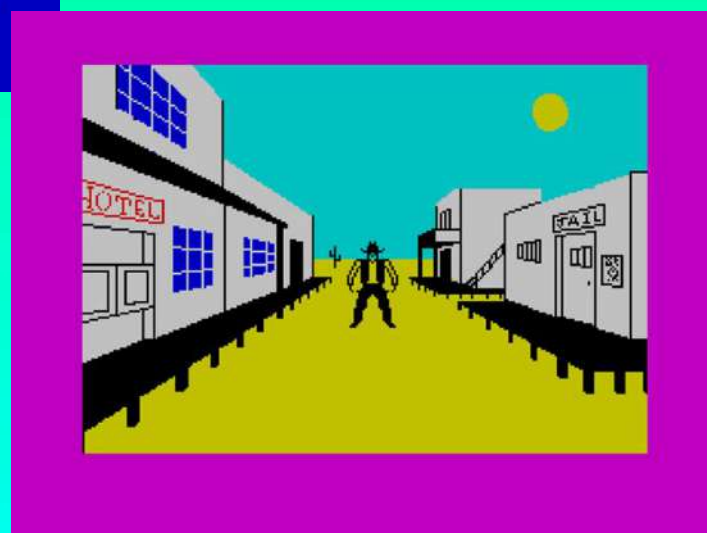
A classic from the 'simple yet effective' school of art

"The hell ya will". That was John Wayne



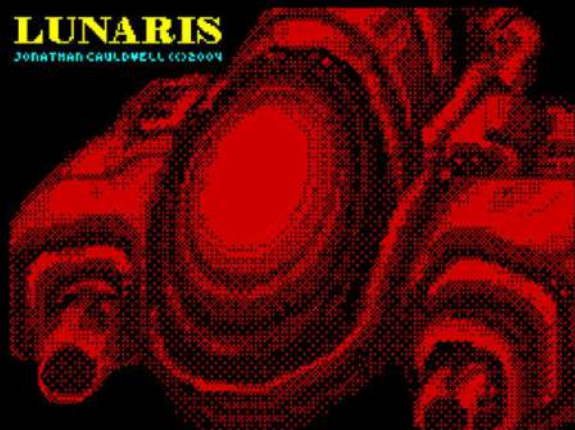
Why, these places ALL sound just delightful!

The locals see so many of these nowadays, they don't even leave their houses to watch anymore



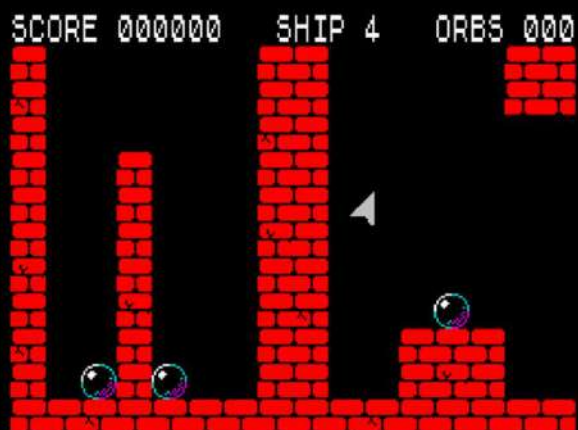
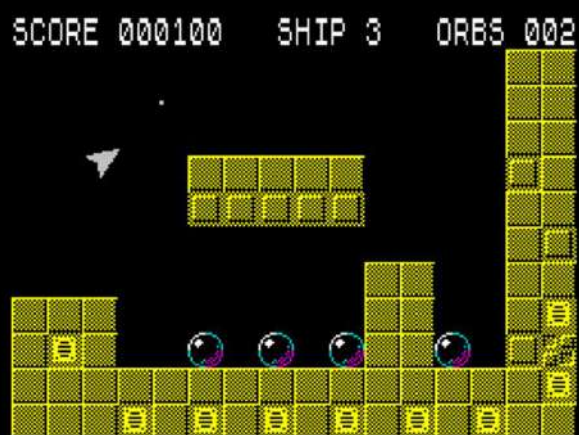
LUNARIS

JONATHAN CAULDWELL COZMOON



"This is not... the actual ship in the game, no... this is just a tribute"

Al, you're meant to be picking up those 4 bubbles, not careering around, shooting at nothing



Level 2 goes for a moody industrial age brick effect. With bubbles for whimsy

Dodging space pixels fired by spray cans can be tricky in zero grav



LUNARIS

(Jonathan Cauldwell, 2004) &

COLOCO

(Tuxedo Games, 2020)

Who invented thrusting on the Spectrum? Which isn't a suggestion by the way. I think, if this isn't a stupid thing to say, it might have been Firebird, with **Thrust**. I imagine that that kind of control (*or more often lack of control*) method was unique at that point. Hence why that title was quite a big hit, on the BBC Micro at least. I always found it intriguing but a bit sensitive for my none too delicate teenage instincts. As for the sequel where you had to drag that ball around, forget about it!

I don't recall too many Thrust clones really in the classic days of Speccyness, though some games featured docking bits which had similar mechanics. However in 2004 the mighty **Jonathan Cauldwell** gave it a go with **Lunaris**. So you knew it'd be good. Apparently he wrote it in just *5 hours* at a computer show that year. Now that's showboating if ever I've heard it...

No inlay or anything, but clearly your little arrowy ship has to collect a load of bubbles, no sorry orbs, in order to escape the level and go onto a yet more fiendish one. Gun turrets make their presence known here and there, but luckily you have your own pea-shooter to give them some of it back.

This game is tough but really good. If you play it properly you may struggle, but there is a password system which proves invaluable (*"JCRULESDK" doesn't work though, so don't try it*) and so I managed to reach the inevitable level 3. But it's mega addictive even so, with some music from **Matt Westcott** that's out of this world. Snazzy hi-score table too.



They have space-suits to fit ALL body shapes nowadays, even 'unrealistically curvaceous'

Grab the key, unlock the door and rescue The Stig. Contemporary references, we got 'em



Things get tighter and bluer on later levels, but your hunk o' junk is up to the task so long as the pilot is

Thrusting... big balls... write your own caption



16 years later there thrusts onto the scene another contender for the 'no gravity' crown, **Coloco** by **Tuxedo Games**, who appear to have made no other Speccy titles. Shame, 'cos this is quality. Oops spoiler, no it's not, it's rubbish. Phew, can't go giving the game away like that in the first paragraph, what an amateur!

Anyway, this has to be the most colourful thruster in town. It resembles **Cybernoid** in looks but is actually playable (*just kidding Raf*) and a different affair altogether really. No HellTubes, phew. You have to pilot your dinky little craft to pick up a stranded astro-nut, then take him back to space base. But don't despair, it's not as hard as rescuing those boffins in Airwolf. Argh, flashbacks.

You get loads of lives, a nice touch in any game (except **Technician Ted** of course). And once you've cracked how your vessel moves, you'll be picking those levels off nicely. Sometimes you'll need to pick up extra fuel or a space key to unlock pesky space doors. And the difficulty level increases sensibly, no nasty shocks have hit me so far. Tune's good but is sadly marooned on the menu screen, didn't quite make it into the game proper.

So which thruster thrusts the thrustiest? Both these games are really solid efforts, and lots of fun in their own way. If I'm forced to choose and not fudge it by giving them equal scores, I'd opt for the greater playability and good looks of... **Coloco**! But I reckon they're both a match for Firebird's Thrusts, heresy though that undoubtedly is...

SPACED-OUT VERDICT

LUNARIS

87%

COLOCO

88%



50 TIMES *CRASH* gLiTcHeD!

Part 1

You'll have to forgive the deliberately provocative title here, though it probably did get your attention if you're being honest. First of all, let me make it clear that I worshipped Newsfield's finest rag as a teenager, eagerly snapping up practically every issue up until around 1990 or so. And to see it come back recently has been a wonderful thing. Naturally I also bought quite a few copies of Your Sinclair and Sinclair User and enjoyed them too. But Crash always seemed to have the edge when it came to dependable and accurate reviewing, while YS and SU frequently seemed to go a bit 'off-road'. As such the number of times I'd disagree with their reviews would surely go into the hundreds, but it was actually quite a challenge to find 50 times where Crash *might* have been in the wrong. It's all subjective anyway of course, but Top 50s and Top 100s are always great for starting pointless arguments, aren't they? And if there's one thing that retro gamers enjoy... So let the quibbling begin, with...

50. SIDEWIZE (Firebird) 50%



As I've mentioned in a previous review, this graphically impressive sideways shooter and its sequel really did split the audience. SU gave it a *10/10 Classic*, the best possible score anything could ever get. And YS lauded it too, declaring it a *9/10 Megagame*. While these two mags' staffers must clearly have been sniffing glue at the time of playing it, Crash spectacularly disagreed. *50%*. Quite literally only half-decent. I can't get along with the game myself, however I think it definitely deserved better than half marks. What's wrong with the middle ground, I ask you? Somewhere between all 3 sets of scores must surely be the right outcome here. Spectrum Computing's user reviews make it a 7, although it seems whenever you average anything (*Metacritic*, yes) it comes out at a 7. Sounds bob-on to me though.

49. INDOOR SPORTS (Advance) 50%



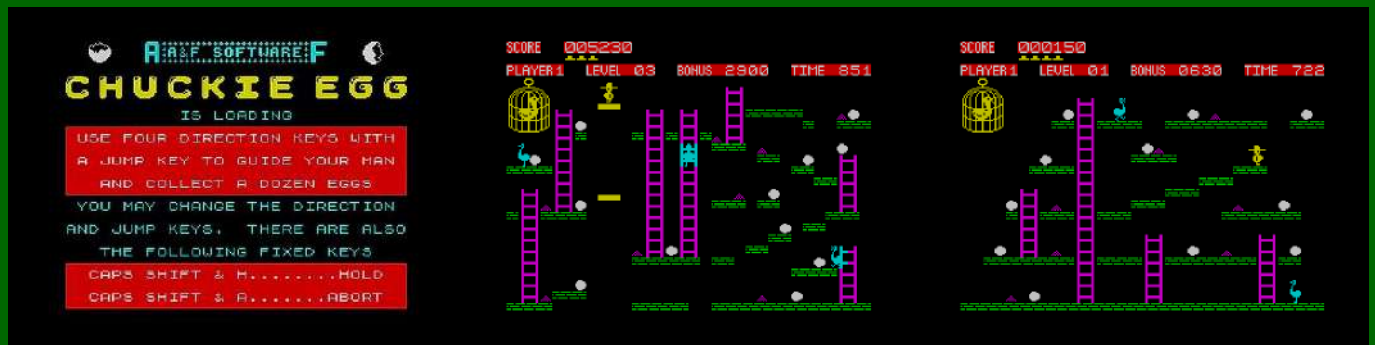
Onto more obscure ground now, and I recall playing this one back in '87, a rare Speccy release from Advance Software. It featured darts, ping pong, ten-pin bowling and, fabulously, air hockey. All games you could play without fear of getting sunburned. Admittedly it didn't have an exciting title, or much of a fanfare on release, but I remember the four games being pretty serviceable on the whole. SU gave it *4 out of 5 stars*, still persevering with their minimalist ratings system at this point, and YS handed it *8/10*. This seems a bit more like it, but Crash grumpily only gave it half marks again. I suppose it does prompt the unlikely question, which is better - Indoor Sports or Sidewize?

48. SUPER SOCCER (Imagine) 56%



Many aeons before the likes of FIFA and ISS, even before the age of Emlyn Hughes, in between Match Day and Match Day II there came Super Soccer. Early 1987 to be exact. I just about remember playing this for a while, but my over-riding memory of it is that the players were quite gangly compared to the stubby little guys of Match Day (*who were to go even more Maradonaesque in Match Day II*). I think it was a pretty alright game though, and so did SU (4*) and YS (8/10). So Crash's mark does seem a bit curmudgeonly by comparison. Not the crime of the century, but there it is.

47. CHUCKIE EGG (A & F) 80%



In many ways Chuckie Egg is possibly the most famous Spectrum game ever. Ask anyone who's ever had even a brief tinker on Sir Clive's baby, and they'll have heard of it. It was one of the early classics that had such simple gameplay, but was so addictive and very well programmed too, with bags of character. And once that bird got out of the cage, well... a more panicky time you'll probably never experience in gaming. It was universally lauded and always raises a smile on people's faces, so frankly, Crash – 80% is a bit of an insult really.

46. CHAOS (Games Workshop) 8/10



Now then. It has been well documented within these pages (*no this isn't a book, but it still works because web pages, see?*) that Julian Gollop's wizardy wonder is one of the absolute high points of Speccy gaming. So although Crash clearly liked it, as well they should, surely it cannot be disputed that they've still short-changed it criminally. It should be 9 and some might even claim 10 (*shush Dave*). SU acted similarly, giving it 4*. But YS were worst of all, its score averaging out to 6/10. Mainly because of some twit called Roger giving it a pathetic 2/5. Roger, I'm coming to hunt you down, son!

45. SHOCKWAY RIDER (F.T.L.) 67%



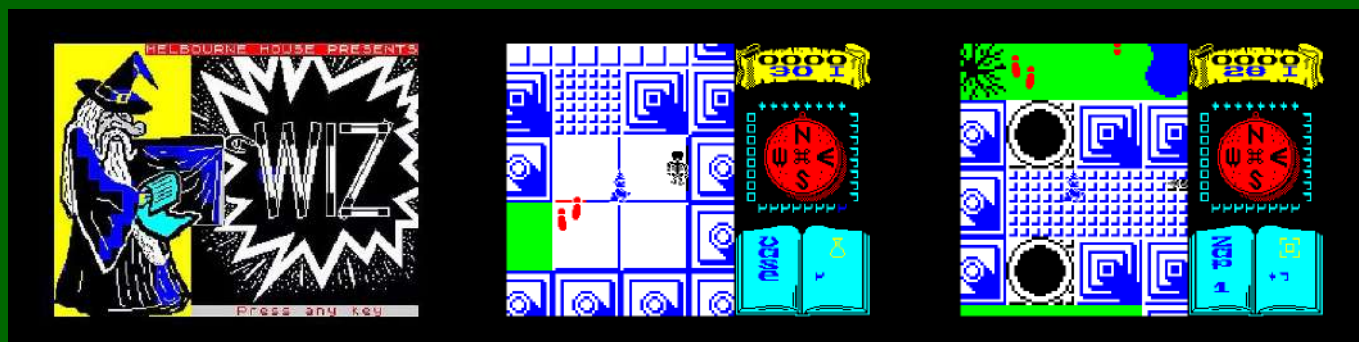
Gargoyle's arcade label F.T.L. began with a bang with the awesome Light Force, then offered us this title. Given how epic Light Force was, and how the Gargoyle posse have pretty much never erred to my recollection, maybe the Crash lads boobed here? SU went gaga with a 5* *Classic* and YS went hoop-la with a 9/10 *Megagame*. Let's have a nose to see what the Spectrum Computing user reviews say. Hmmm, 6.6/10. Well, that makes me look like a right numpty now doesn't it? Controversy reigns!

44. SORCERER LORD (P.S.S.) 70%



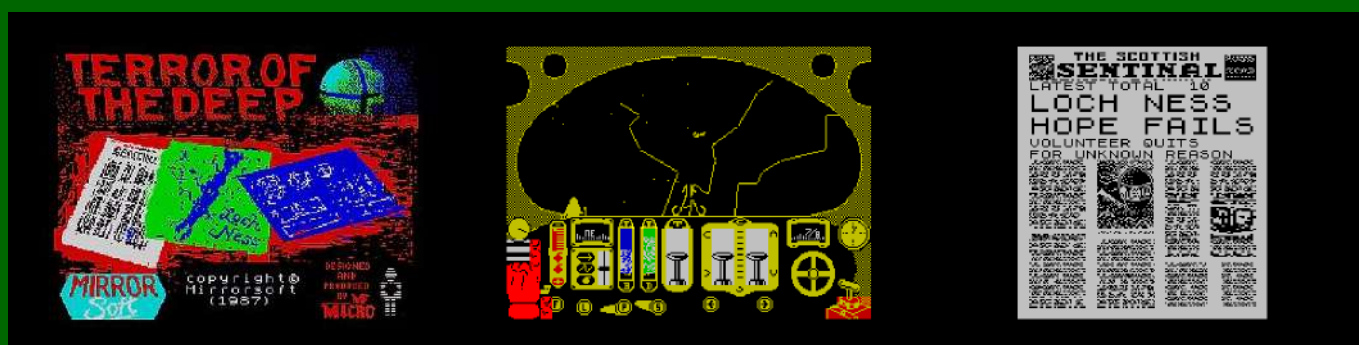
I did think this might be the sequel to the spiffy Swords & Sorcery, but this is something quite different. It's a fantasy game but has the look of many a C.C.S. or Lothlorien wargame. But surely it's more interesting than those, what with all the magic and stuff? Crash's rating might look fairly hedging-their-betsy but the other mags really went to town on it. Just the 10/10 *Classic* in SU and a 9/10 *Megagame* in YS. Admittedly those 2 mags tended to like strategic affairs more than Crash (they were more studious/patient/boring), but the Ludlow lot seem a touch out of step with this one.

43. WIZ (Melbourne House) 38%



This was a fantasy-themed maze game written partly by John “Booty” Cain, but clearly Crash hated its living guts, maybe due to the lack of pirates. Or when they loaded it up with their dusty Currah Microspeech attached, they didn’t get the bonus game they were hoping for. While the others thought it was more of a 7/10 (YS) or even a 8/10 (SU). So what does Joe Punter say, aka the Spectrum Computing user reviews? Nothing. Nobody cares. Okay then.

42. TERROR OF THE DEEP (Mirrorsoft) 44%



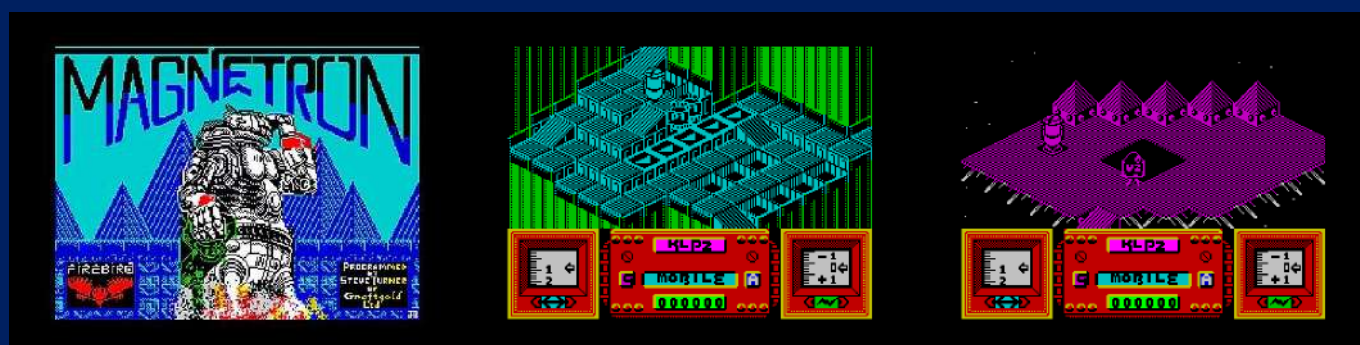
What’s this then, a simulation of diving into Loch Ness for to find the renowned mythical monster? Sounds quite intriguing, if a little wet. Maybe Crash weren’t grown up enough for simulations in those days, I know I wasn’t either, so I can hardly judge. They slated this one, while YS said it merited 8/10 and SU agreed with 4 stars. Even the by now crusty old punters who frequent the SC website say it’s worth 7, and they’re notoriously grumpy. Sorry Crash, you lose this time!

41. THRUST II (Firebird) 48%



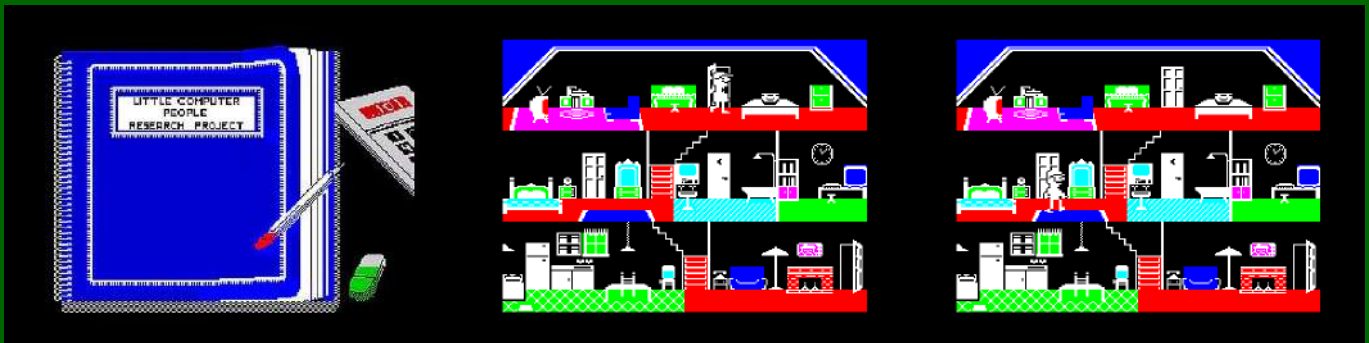
I remember buying this budget sequel, extravagant bugger that I must have been, splashing out a whole 2 squid for it. I remember it was rock hard but on the whole quite a cool game, and one that looked to expand on the original, which everyone liked. Ah no, wait a minute. Crash only gave Thrust I 76%. Then this. Clearly they weren't very proficient thrusters, oooer fnar hatstand bundle etc. How about the others? 5* in SU, a 9/10 Megagame in YS. Talk about extremes...

40. MAGNETRON (Firebird) 57%



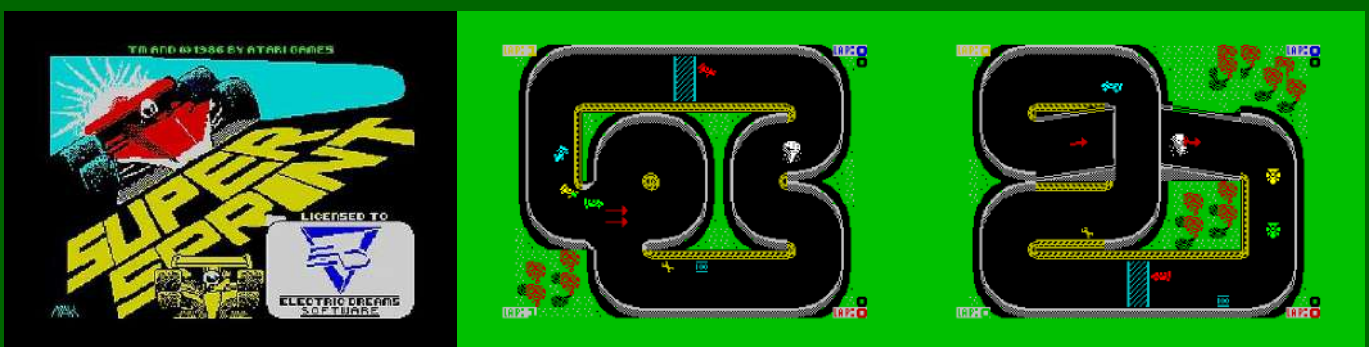
I don't think there's ever been anyone who's disliked Quazatron. It was universally lauded, even by the likes of me who couldn't play it for toffee. However the law of sequels states that you can probably expect something incredibly similar, but maybe not *quite* as good. Then the third entry in the series gets a bit worse, and on it goes. But a drop from 94% to 57% - how bad must this sequel have been? Judging by SU's 10/10 Classic (jeez, calm down guys) and YS's 8/10, probably not bad at all. Did Steve Turner, in his cardigan and a balaclava borrowed from Mr. Townsend, firebomb Crash Towers one afternoon and they held a grudge ever since?

39. LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE (Activision) 57%



This was massively ahead of its time, wasn't it? Creating a little man in a little house, then doing various things to keep him happy, so he doesn't get suicidal and burn the place down? Decades later The Sims was a huge hit, though I've never quite seen the attraction myself. Bit like Big Brother. But most seemed to dig it, with SU and YS recognising how ground-breaking it must have been, with a 5* *Classic* and a 9/10 *Megagame* respectively. While grumpy Crash gave it a measly 57%. You've got to think they didn't have the patience for this one.

38. SUPER SPRINT (Electric Dreams) 58%



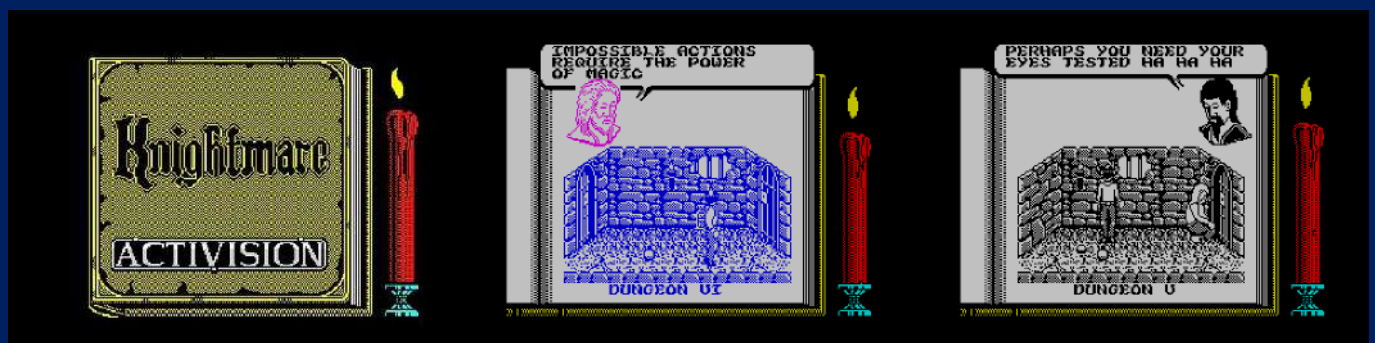
Hmm interesting. I was just trying to figure out which came out first, this game or the Codies' Grand Prix Simulator. Looks like Crash reviewed GPS in October '87, then this game the following month. And they didn't like either. Maybe this genre is more Marmite than I'd have thought, but all I know is that my mates and I had great fun with both games, for all their individual foibles. 3D Stock Cars blew them into the reeds eventually, but this was still top multiplayer fun. Oddly YS gave it 5/10 and SU were only slightly more generous with a 7/10 rating. Frankly, this is all just plain wrong!

37. NEMESIS THE WARLOCK (Martech) 61%



I'm a fairly recent convert to 2000 A.D., and Nemesis the comic is one of the all time classics. Slaine ain't bad either, and Judge Dredd naturally. I have to admit this game looks no great shakes and Crash gave it a mediocre score as you can see. But you know what I'm going to say next. Yes, SU had it at a 5* Classic and YS a 9/10 Megagame. So there's got to be some substance in there, they don't just give those awards away y'know. Oh hang on...

36. KNIGHTMARE (Activision) 62%



We all watched the offbeat TV show at the time, featuring Treebeard before he became an Ent. And we all enjoyed laughing at hapless teenagers stumbling about the place wearing dark helmets and repeating "You're in a roooooom". And the game looks intriguing enough. Admittedly I'm trusting SU on this, which is rarely a good move, but they gave it the absolute max treatment. Yes, again. 7/10 from YS is more lukewarm. Alright, this one is a bit of a punt, but there still remains the distinct possibility that Crash might have misjudged this unusual adventure.

35. WEC LE MANS (Imagine) 66%



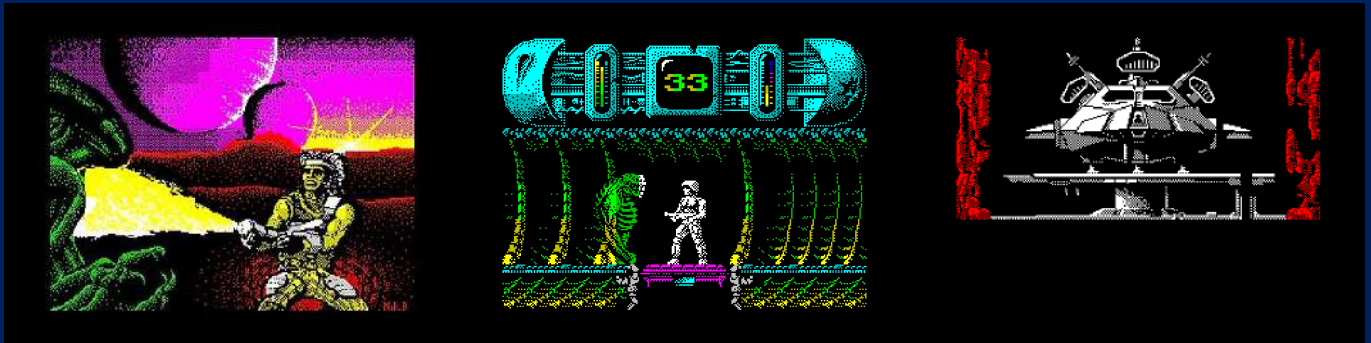
Most racing games were positively lapped up (*unintentional pun*) by both gamers and mags alike. There were so many good ones, and the odd duffer naturally. Maybe the excessive amount of them counted against this title by the time 1989 came round, and Crash had just had enough of them. I bought it when it hit budget price, and found it was pretty good really. I didn't quite have the same enthusiasm level as SU (91% *Classic*) and YS (9/10 *Megagame*) but it should certainly have been a solid 80%er in my book. Maybe Crash didn't have the endurance for it (*geddit*), or alternatively they may have played it for 24 hours straight until they vomited, *then* did their review.

34. TERRORPODS (Melbourne House) 30%



Eh, what's this then? This odd-looking game inspired a stark difference between Crash's mark and the Sinclairses'. 70% in SU, conversely 7/10 in YS. It looks spacey and shooty and is a conversion of a 16-bit 'classic' the inlay brags. I think Crash must have got pi\$\$ed at our Australian friends at some point (*ref. Wiz at #44*), as it certainly doesn't look like a game that would get 30%. Even Blade Runner got more than that, and have you played Blade Runner?!

33. TRANTOR-THE LAST STORMTROOPER *(Go!)* 68%



We've been over this before on the site, with specific reference to the shonky '80s rock choon on the B-Side. Oh, and I forgot I did a review of it too before that, how time flies. There's a pattern emerging in some of these cases, namely that SU (10/10 *Classic*) and YS (9/10 *Megagame*) go massively OTT, while Crash decide to go massively UTT. Tends to be with most of these that the truth lies somewhere in the middle, and that's certainly true here, as it's not a bad game on the whole.

32. QUARTET *(Activision)* 36%



It could be that the Newsfield boys were not fond of Activision too, as they've come up a few times thus far. I'm sure they must have liked some of their games, let's have a check. Ah yes, they Smashed Enduro Racer, Hammerfist, Mindshadow, The Real Ghostbusters and Time Machine. But boy did they hate Quartet, another one clobbered into the 30% range. SU said 9/10, overexcitable as ever, but YS also dug it, giving it 8/10. It certainly doesn't look like a 36% game, but looks can deceive as we know.

31. IKARI WARRIORS *(Elite)* 76%



The mighty Crash didn't actually disagree with the mighty-ish YS and... SU on this game. 7 from the SU jury and 8 from YS. There were similarities to Commando of course, strong ones. But Commando was surely a classic, and this game offered the chance for 2 player destruction on an unprecedented level. This facet of the game alone means it should surely be not too far off the 90% kind of range. I don't think these reviewers had time to play with their mates, with monthly deadlines looming. Or maybe they just lacked mates, like me. At least I've got the excuse that I'm very old now.

30. DALEY THOMPSON'S SUPER TEST *(Ocean)* 76%



Despite its joystick-hating gameplay, pretty much everyone enjoyed Mr. Thompson's Decathlon as it was quite original, on the Speccy at least, if not in the arcade. Crash gave that one 82%, perhaps a bit on the low side. The year after there was a big fight between this game and Hypersports, which the Joffa title rightly won. But D.T.S.T. really wasn't that far behind, and there was plenty to enjoy with the wide range of sporty gubbins on offer. YS really liked it, a 9/10 *Megagame* no less, while SU had it at 4*. I don't think Crash were a million miles out, but far enough to justify inclusion in this list.

29. DYNAMITE DAN *(Mirrorsoft)* 94%



This one's a bit controversial possibly. The sequel to this game I absolutely loved, a real Spectrum classic. But the original? As great as it looks, I think the playability factor is way out of whack. It's nigh on impossible to get anywhere in the game, with a ludicrous amount of baddies constantly coming at you. It's hugely impressive just how much is going on at once, but I would argue it's too much. And I think Crash were so taken with the game's looks, they went rather over the top on the score. SU gave it 5* but no *Classic*, while YS really went low with 7/10. Hmmmm...

28. PRESIDENT *(Addictive)* 29%



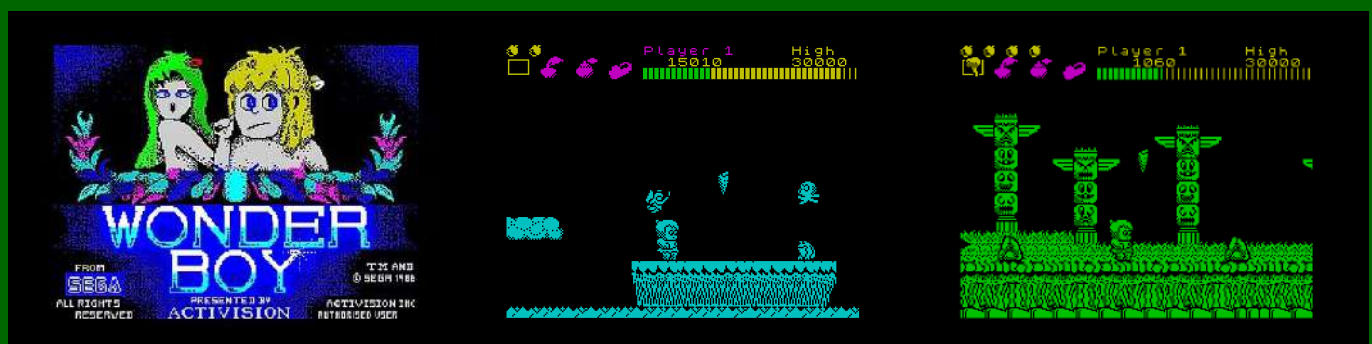
Now admittedly this site often has a playful swipe at Kevin Toms' publicity machine, but surely it's not possible that this game merits such a pitiful rating? Its looks are quite primitive and it did come a whole 5 years after the iconic Football Manager, but those strategy lovers SU saw fit to give it 4*, while YS acted similarly with a 7/10 score. I think the Crash boys must surely have been guilty of a lack of respect here – the guy practically invented the football management genre. And made the beard uber-fashionable for hipsters to come.

27. THE GROWING PAINS OF ADRIAN MOLE *(Virgin)* 88%



I just noticed that this game was published by Virgin, quite funny considering how Mole's constantly trying to get his end away and failing! We all know and love Level 9 for their myriad accomplished adventures over the years, but the Adrian Mole games were a bit different. Though not in a good way. The first landed in '85 and was viewed as quirky amusement, albeit with terrible blocky pictures. Fair enough. But did the world really need a massively similar sequel 2 years later? SU had it at 3* while YS appear to have refused to review it. Can't really blame them.

26. WONDER BOY *(Activision)* 43%



Well well, Crash's Activision hatred continues apace! I don't think this was the worst of arcade conversions, despite the inevitable monochrome fare. The graphics are quite nice and it plays okay, if a bit slow. SU gave it 8/10 and YS 7/10, which I feel like I've said a million times by now, how predictable. Crash certainly didn't play it safe and slagged it off viciously. It always came as a bit of a shock when they really went to town on a game like this, as they were usually spot-on. *Apart from these 50 examples of course!*

TOP 25 COMING YOUR WAY SOON...



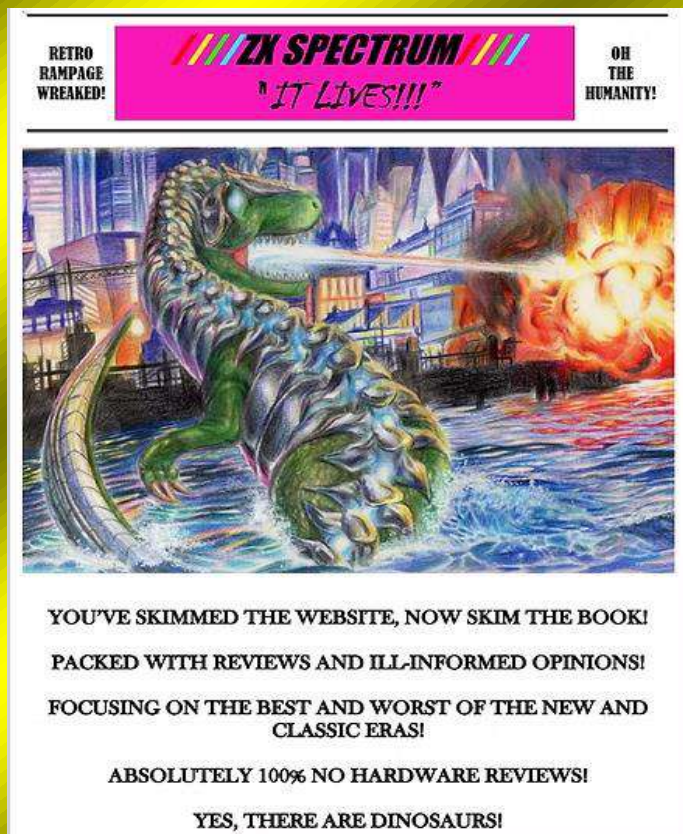
Al & Dave's A to Z of Speed Reviews



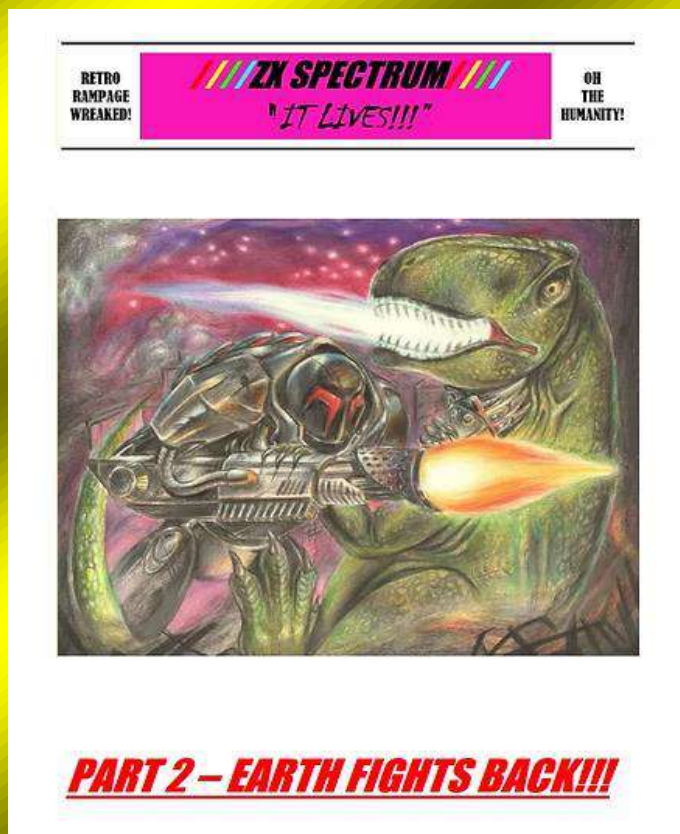
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ZX Spectrum - It Lives!!! Part One



ZX Spectrum - It Lives!!! Part Two

OLLI & LISSA 1,2 & 3

(Firebird, 1986. Silverbird, 1987. Cartoon Time, 1990)

Roger Danison did all the Olli and Lissa games, and no others it seems. The first title was a huge hit, selling mega numbers for B. T.'s lot. But the sequel and further sequel seemed to be relatively low profile releases for some reason. Let's throw 'em against the wall anyway and see what sticks.

In the first game, **Shilmoore Castle** in Scooootland is home to Sir Humphrey the ghost. It's in danger of being bought by an American billionaire (*he gave up with Chelsea*) and moved to the U. S. A. brick by brick. The ghost doesn't fancy a move abroad, so decides he needs to knock up a potion to make himself invisible, so he can scare away the big noise and keep his rightful home. Who makes this stuff up?

Olli and Lissa are Sir Humphrey's mates, so are helping him find 8 ingredients for said potion. Well Olli does, Lissa just mixes them up in the cauldron (*bit sexist*). He has to avoid the less friendly ghosts in the castle who are out to get him. Why can't *they* spook the American guy instead? Oh I don't know.

Anyway, this is platform country. The graphics are brilliant and characterful, but boy do they flicker, which is a shame. What's more of a shame though is the collision detection, which is off-puttingly harsh. Jumping over enemies is far too difficult, so back in the day I couldn't get past the second ingredient. These days, saving game state got me to about number 5 or 6 eventually, but boy what a struggle. It kinda ruins this great looking game sadly.

A year later came the sequel, although the box just says '**Halloween**'. Surely if you've had a hit game, you want to at least mention it in the title of the sequel? Come on Firebird/Silverbird, whatever you're called, it's *Marketing 101*. To be fair, it looks like the Olli and Lissa connection might have been an afterthought as they don't feature that much in this game.

The storyline is so twee I can't bring myself to repeat it. Just suffice it to say you play Arabella the fairy, who has to return 16 magical objects to



This rad screen is possibly even better than Transylvanian Tower's

Some great artwork, and one of the game's less ba\$tdy screens



Woah! But this screen looks more like Jack & The Beanstalk. Clash, clash, clash!

O&L2 has great graphics. Not sure if all the smiling makes the game creepier or not



their rightful places in the castle. In which Olli and Lissa are also knocking about somewhere. It's all very unpromising.

But wait! There's an *actually* playable game here. It's quite different from the original and not a platformer, thank gawd. You fly around instead, trying to locate them objects and avoid them ghoulies. It's still hard as nails – it's a Spectrum game after all – but the refreshing twist is that your fairy seems well able to explore the castle quite extensively before she carks. It's an enjoyably colourful jaunt, so that's good.

Some time later, once B. T. had departed the Speccy scene, **Code Masters** took up the cudgel, whatever that may be. They 'dropped' (*urgh*) O&L3:TCA in 1990 on their Cartoon Time label. But would it turn out to be "*absolutely unbelievable*"?

Well they stuck with a similar set-up to the second game, but this time you're controlling good old Olli again (*Lissa's around... somewhere*). Some absolute bar steward has taken Olli's car apart and spread the pieces around the castle, like this is **Automania** or something! Random I know. Maybe Lissa did it to pi** him off.

Not often is the third entry in a series the best of the lot, but that's certainly the case here. It looks great, with some lovely cute graphics (*which no longer flicker*) and it's retained the playability of the second game. It's good fun to play but not to map, since **Mr. Danison** clearly loves it when you go through a door, then go back again, and you wind up somewhere totally different. Most disorientating.

THE VERDICT

OLLI & LISSA

71%

HALLOWEEN: OLLI & LISSA II

78%

OLLI & LISSA III: CANDLELIGHT ADVENTURE

86%





Think I've got a unicorn stashed away somewhere in my loft too

Beautiful skyline in the threequel, but argh... someone's nicked the castle



Remember picking up the phone? That's so 1990s



Everyone do your 'shocked' face at the count of three





Sometimes a still image isn't quite the best. This bit's flashy in the game. Sorry...

Tiny wizard hides behind a tiny wall so tiny monster can't see him



Warrior man approaches a yellow chest. Watch out for your ghoulies

Mysterious character X has to fight off some ents here. Tolkien gonna sue



TINY DUNGEONS

(RetroSouls, 2022) &

DESCENDING DUNGEONS

(James Broad, 2016)

Crawling around dungeons appeals to some. It's nice to make your fortune by pocketing trinkets and liberally smiting the dungeon denizens with your massive battle-axe, shouting "*I only have to be lucky once!*" to no-one in particular. But I remember renting *Vagrant Story* from Blockbuster for a few days, as you did back then, for the original Playstation, since it was a Square Enix game, and they had wowed everyone on the planet at the time with all their *Not Even Slightly Final Fantasies*. It started alright, the usual turn-based fighting malarkey, but after a while all the rooms started to feel the same. Fresh air was there none. And this made me feel a little despairing and dismal. I'm a human, see - I need fresh air now and then. Even as a pallid retro gamer.

But hopefully I can put my dungeonophobia aside for a little while, so I can check out these two Spectral... dungeons. Really can't think of another word for them, best get used to hearing that one. First up is *Tiny Dungeons*... argh, I'm feeling claustrophobic already.

I very much like the Tiny plot. "*An evil necromancer holds the land of Twilight in fear. Three brave heroes set out into the ancient dungeons to put an end to his evil deeds.*" There you go, it does the job nicely. Although it might be nice to know who the heroes actually are... but no matter, we know the drill by now.

So the warrior (*almost certainly*), the wizard (*dead cert*) and maybe a valkyrie (*sounds reasonable*) set forth with their health points, shield points and magic points on show for all to see. How many dungeons are there? I dunno, but I've reached number 5 before getting squished.

Cunningly you can juggle the 3 combatants at will to suit your circumstances, which is handy when one of your dudes is looking a bit peeky. And if you see a particular pick-up you can choose who picks up the pick-up. Like giving the wiz any magic point boosts, say. This results in greater teamwork, better morale and improved productivity among the proletariat. Most patriotic.

Considering the tininess of everything, the game looks really good. Hugely colourful U.D.G.s everywhere. And you can see quite a bit of the map at once. The enemies only actually move when you do, so you can treat it like a chess game if you really want to, gets a bit boring that way though. There is of course some brill music to jolly things along, this being a *Grachev* production.



Loading screen by M.C. Escher

*The pentagrams teleport you
elsewhere and make an
entertaining bloopy noise*



*It's moodily gothy in this room,
with the chest, candlesticks and...
pouffe*

*The sorceress is a 24/7 party girl,
always whooping her head off*



Now we go down, down, down (*rock lobster*) into those **Descending Dungeons**. It's a gang of four this time round, greedily seeking lost treasures as per usual. Admirable in their equality are the barbarian, she-warrior, magician and sorceress. There's a dragon lord to smite at the end too, I'm told.

Each dungeoneer can carry three items, which is pretty generous. A melee one, a ranged one and another one, spells and stuff mostly. Magic types can hurl bolts of varying sorts, while fighters naturally pack more of a punch. There are 9 dungeons to complete your quest, then go home for sandwiches.

Y'know what this reminds me of? Most **Gollopian** games - Chaos, Rebelstar, Battlecars (*okay, maybe not that one*). The key layout is the same, the turn-based action is the same and the combat is too. But this is not a problem - if you're going to copy, then do it from a god in human form. The world can never have enough Gollop-inspired games in my book.

Each adventurer gets rather a lot of Action Points, possibly too many, with which to move, fight and love (*not really*). And fights with enemies are quite fun, if generally a bit too one-sided in your favour. But tragically the best thing Mr. Gollop ever invented is absent here. I speak of **Opportunity Fire**. The element that makes so many of his games such a random riot.

It's got a lot right, this game. And I floated through about half of the 9 dungeons happily enough, hardly losing a member of my questly team. Things eventually do get tougher later on and the levelling-up of your equipment keeps your interest up. But in the end I think those old dungeon doldrums stuck me again after a while and I was gasping for fresh air.

The same can also be said for **Tiny Dungeons**. As such the lack of variety tends to be a killer in the end, even more so than the deadly dungeon denizens. I'm going to give **Descending Dungeons** the edge for trying slightly harder to keep me amused.

DUNGEON DECISION

TINY DUNGEONS 80%

DESCENDING DUNGEONS 82%



MOTOS &

PLEXAR

(M.A.D. Games, 1987)

Is it **Moe-Toes** or **Moe-tos**? This was a Namco coin-op, so came from the land of the rising sun if that helps. The first one sounds right to me, although your own ship seems to be the only *moe-toe* around that I can see. Interesting, isn't it? No? And totally moot since this article is written, not spoken? I see.

Whatever it's called, it was written by **Binary Design**, who surveys show wrote most Spectrum budget games. So we're in safe hands it seems. And most of Mastertronic's "*Added Dimension*" titles tended to be those they deemed too good to give away for just 199 paltry pennies, so were mostly quite palatable. Except for all the ones that weren't. Actually quite a few. Moving on...

You have to clear solar bases of space bees by bumping them off the edge into the endless void. I thought we were meant to be saving the **bees**? You can get extra power parts to give your ship more oomph and extra jump parts so you can clear gaps and get yourself out of tight spots. This tends to crack the floor though, which sounds expensive and is usually fatal. As time goes by the baddies get fatter and harder to shove off, so that's where your power parts come into play. Erm, ooer?

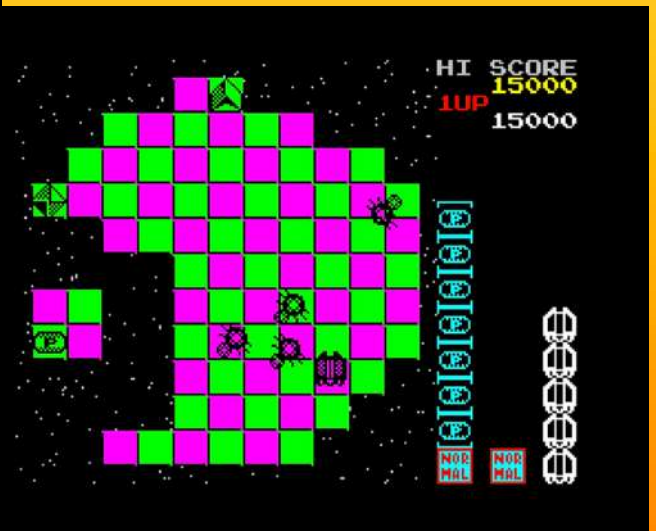
This game might not look like much, but it is much. Very much. From the off it has an authentic arcade feel with great music, neat colourful graphics and that font all arcade games seemed to have. But even better is they've got the physics spot-on too, as your ship acts just how it should. And I know 'cos I've driven a *lot* of spaceships in my time.

When you're trying desperately to knock off a rather heavy foe, you really feel up against it and have to make good use of your add-ons to get anywhere at all. It's great addictive fun and a bit of a stealth budget **classic** by my reckoning.



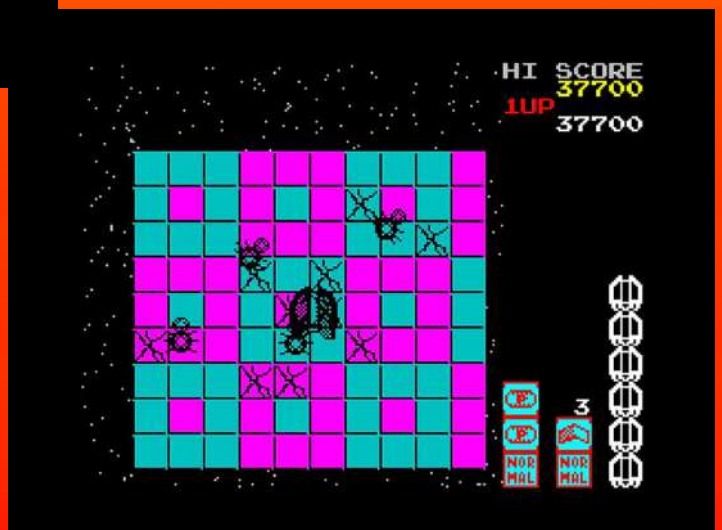
About half of a good loading screen here, as your moe-toe takes flight

It'll be a brave moe-toe who's willing to jump onto Pac-Man's power pill island here



Here's where you choose your parts. 2 jumps but no powers. Uh oh...

Argh, stop all that jumping will ya? The place is coming apart!



Another ravin' M.A.D. game from '87 now. **The Roads Of Plexar**, to give it its full monicker, came from **Paul Hargreaves**, who also gave us Tantalus, Terminus, Glass and Strontium Dog. 3 out of 4 ain't too shabby on balance. It was inspired by Trailblazer, which I've not played, but looking at the RZX run-through, it looks insanely fast. Plexar is I think a more sedate old man's version of same. Which is a relief all round.

The Plexarians like to send hapless victims along the Crystal Roads to appease their deities (*stupid gits*). You have (been) volunteered to go next, so off you roll! You make your hazardous way along roadways, then across towers, then onto the next area. Oh, and you're a ball by the way.

First you bounce at speed along roadway 1. You can't do too much wrong here, except lose a small amount of health if you hit any holes. Then you have another 3D roadway bit which is more of a puzzly number. You can take a bit more time over that one. Do that and you're onto an overhead view of the tower, where you must choose your path wisely and avoid various nasties. This bit's like a non-bouncy version of good old **Bounder**.

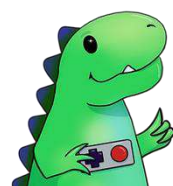
There's a decent amount of game here for your £2.99 (*equivalent to £99.99 these days*). Each part has its own points of interest and difficulty, and it's quite a challenge. It looks excellent, with some great visuals, especially when you've got the 3D path ahead of you on both top and bottom of the screen.

It's clear that a lot of care has gone into it, and that's always a great thing to behold when you've gone and taken a punt on a skinflint special. Long may your path be smooth on your rolly way to **Plexar** itself, god speed little ball.

M.A.D. MARKS



MOTOS	90%
PLEXAR	85%





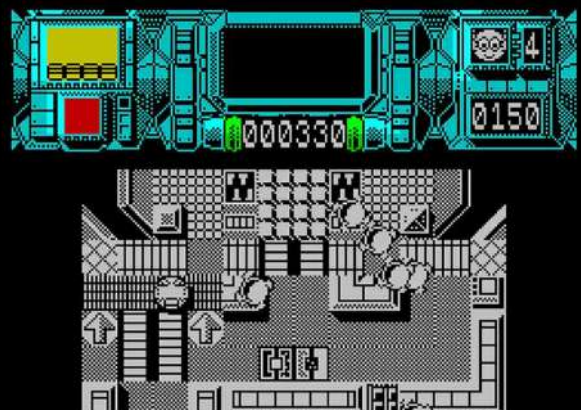
Plans for Birkenhead's new town centre are coming along nicely

Stage 1 sees our ball bounce along at speed. Mind the gaps



Stage 2 only moves when you do thankfully. Different squares do different things

Stage 3 drops a D to become 2D. Roll your way up avoiding the round baddies





*Why do they need such big heads?
They look like those awful Funko Pop
things*

*This area's so rough, even the grannies
are queuing up to pulp you*



*Trash Talk Simulator comes before
each boss fight*

*I found it hard to beat this guy 'cos I
couldn't stop laughing*



MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT *(Sanchez Crew, 2018)* &

ANGELS *(Zosya, 2021)*

I'm not really a huge beat-'em-up fan in recent times. Sure, I've been happy to give **Tekken** a quick go or two, but I've got no interest in such as Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat (*shout in your head when you read that please*) or any similar retroesque affairs. But on the Speccy we were quite spoiled really with the likes of I+K=?, Dragon Dragon, 2 out of 3 **Renegades** and any number of Ways Of Thes. Don't worry, I'm not having a stroke, it was just a really poor sentence.

So since consoles can't be bothered doing fighting games right (*in my uninformed opinion*), leave it once more to the Spectrum boys to bring the noise! There have been a few fighty games in the modern era, so I thought I'd nose at the two least boring looking. Just kidding, I'll give them a fair trial, honest. I'm getting my knuckle dusters on as I write, which is messing with my trying no end.

First Chronos-logically (*worst Spectrum pun ever*) comes **Mighty Final Fight**, a mighty silly name but it came from Japan of course, on the NES originally. I'm not familiar, but I'd imagine this to be a close copy. You have the task of ridding Metro City of those crazy punks The Mad Gears (*I want to call my gang that now*) who have kidnapped the mayor's daughter. The sort of thing that never happens in real life but frequently in films and games.

A typically strong **Sanchez** intro gets us started, including a fairly essential training sesh (*don't skip it like I always do the first time*) and even a choice of 3 fighters, including the Mighty Moustachioed Mayor himself, who's properly pi\$\$ed. The presentation is strong with this one, and once your choice has been made, a-lamping you can go. A couple of miscreants wander onto your screen, you beat em up but good, using special moves when earned, then you get the 'GO!' prompt and on you can jog. At the end of each bit waits the obligatory Bobby Big Boss.

Ah, this is darn good stuff. Resembling **Target; Renegade**, the only game in history to feature a semi-colon, with changing cityscapes throughout, it's graphically excellent, and sonically so too. Slightly less funereal choons than T;R. Gameplay is nice and easy to pick up, though I found my magenta-strength



They're harder than they look, Becky from Roseanne and her gal pal

I think Rika's in Italy now, as two goons stare into the abyss



Not terribly normal for a fighting game, but this bit is way better than I.C.U.P.S.



Out in the woods Kira comes across a guy pretending to be Christopher Walken in The Prophecy



special move did for most foes a bit too easily perhaps. But it's great fun to play and feels proper arcadey, which is a smashing (?) achievement I reckon.

And so onto *Ultraviolence Part II*, **Angels**. Can the mighty Zosya outdo the also mighty Sanchezes? These two Russian combatants really do represent the pinnacle of modern Spectral programming, so we're in the best possible hands. Or bloodied fists. Let's hope they fare better than Dolphin Lundgren in Rocky 27 at least.

"Would you like to meet girls who are out of this world?" Well, you're in luck, as Kira and Rika, who may or may not be the **Cheeky Girls**, have been sent to cr@ppy Earth to fight crime as a punishment for being unacceptably ugly by Neptunian standards. They must rid 5 of your Earth cities of their scummier elements so they can zap back home again.

One can do flying kicks and the other excels in flic-flacs, neither of which seem to be terribly useful but they do look nice. You can swap fighters at any time and they both have their own health bars. Every few successful thwacks they land grants them a big attack. So there's an element of strategy involved in keeping them both alive as long as possible. You can only move right, and sometimes left, so making space for yourself becomes crucial.

There's a surprise mini-game in between levels, where the gals get into their bubble car type space pods and fight their way upwards to their next locale. It's fun, if rather pointless as you can't die during it. Wonder if **Zosya** are planning a scrolly shooter any time soon? Gasp. I'm going to write them a begging letter right now...

As you'd expect **Angels** looks amazing. Great graphics and a shock of colour, plus brill music on the go. It's a fun play, if a little more limited than **Mighty Final Fight**, since going up and down isn't allowed. But the level of detail and general classy feel of it can't be denied. So these are two awesome beat-'em-ups, worthy enough to be whispered in the same breath as **Fist** and **Target; Renegade**. But make sure you do only whisper that, or you'll get beaten up.

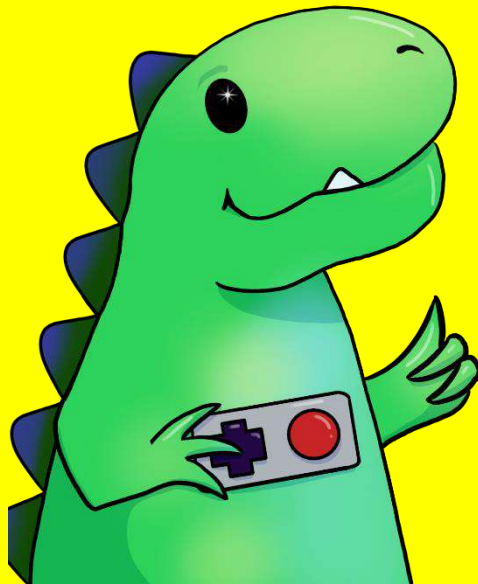
MIGHTY FINAL SCORES

MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT 92%

ANGELS 90%



Part 2



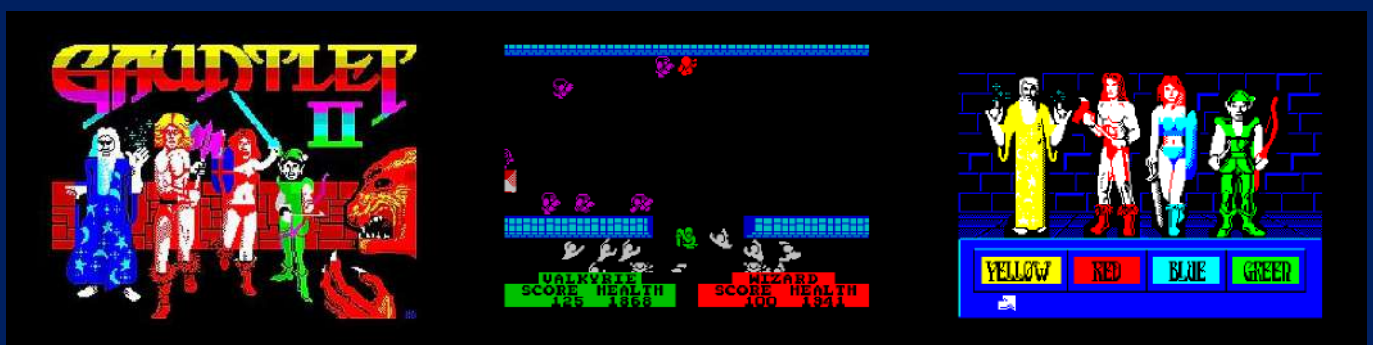
Hey there. Extinct Jim here. I' m here partly to offer greetings from the dinosaur world and partly to fill in a page as my good friends at *ZX SPECTRUM – IT LIVES!!!* are not necessarily very good at spacing features with an odd number of pages out very well. We've already had one advert so another seemed excessive. Sooooo... what have you been up to then? I've been playing the odd game and eating vegetation mostly. I guess you'll want to be seeing more of that glitchy Crash thing then? Okay. without any further filibustering. on we go. so it's "*later, later*" from me.

25. RAID OVER MOSCOW (U.S. Gold) 92%



I'm not sure this one is Crash being out of sync with everyone else, more of a case of me holding a spiteful grudge as a result of personal experience. I saw the *Smashed* review of this game and thought it looked decent, so went and bought it. Then came the aircraft hangar bit, a ludicrous and near impossible task. I barely ever got past it, so can't comment much on the rest of the game. All I know is I wasn't impressed. I'm clearly in the minority as YS gave it a bonkers 5/5 *HIT* score, while SU forgot to review it, the sillies.

24. GAUNTLET II (U.S. Gold) 65%



It was probably inevitable that Gauntlet II would very strongly resemble Gauntlet I. Such are the rules of follow-ups. If it had been a text adventure, people would have complained. But anyone with sense loved the brilliant multiplayer orgy that was the original, and also the Deeper Dungeons that followed. And the law of diminishing returns says that this sequel probably deserved a lesser score than the original, but not to the level that Crash took it. SU typically lacked sense with a 10/10 *Classic*, showing that they didn't actually know how their 'Classic' term worked, while YS probably hit the nail on the head with 8/10.

23. ALIEN 8 *(Ultimate)* 95%



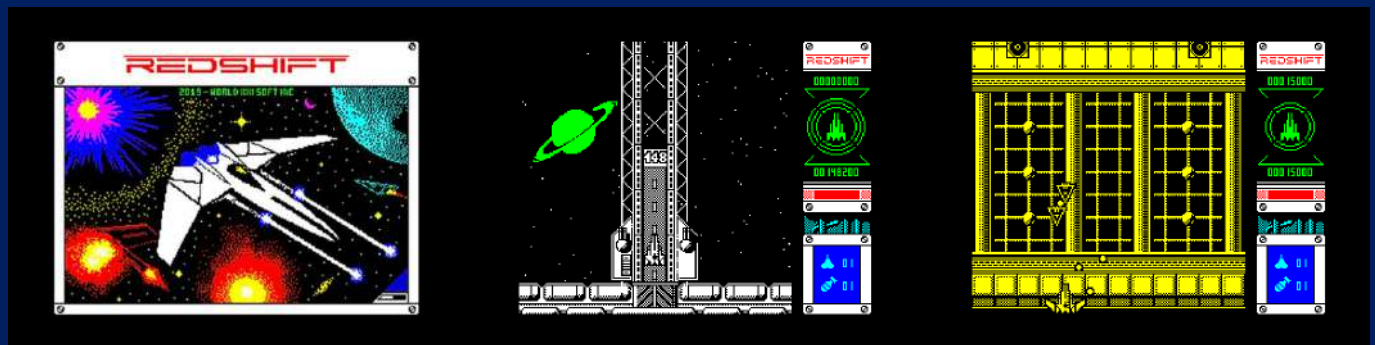
Crash definitely loved Ultimate. And rightly so, up to a point. That point being when they got stuck in a groove releasing isometric game after isometric game, to the exclusion of all others. I know they invented the genre, so were largely entitled to do so, but I recall being a bit underwhelmed by this game. And yes, Alien 8 looked all cool and spacey, but fundamentally added little to the ground-breaking Knight Lore. So how did it score 1% more than it, eh Crash? Never mind. SU said 9/10 while YS waffled a bit about it, but failed to give it a score. Duh.

22. GRYZOR *(Ocean)* 49%



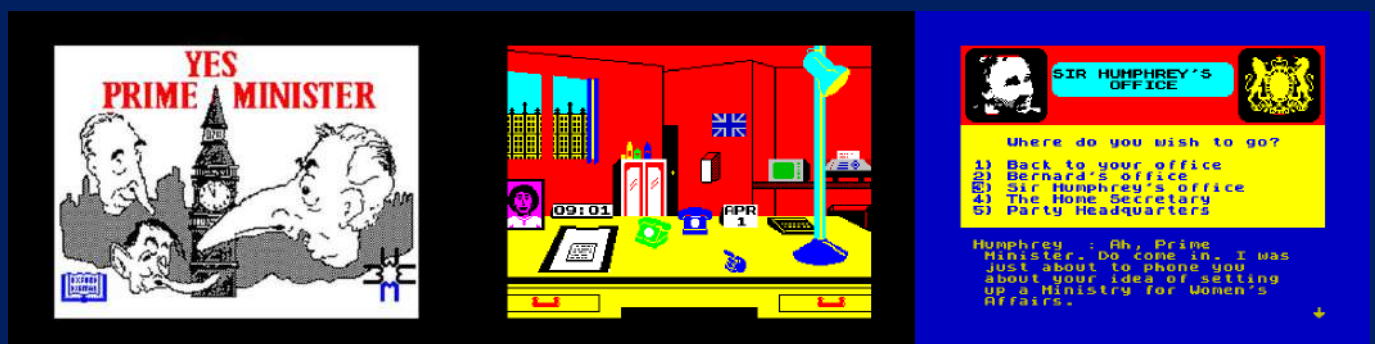
This game didn't appear to be hugely original, but it looked like a fairly impressive conversion of the arcade title, certainly not one of Ocean's duds of old, like Miami Vice, Knight Rider or Street Hawk. YS declared it a *Megagame*, and SU agreed with a hearty 9/10. 3 years after it originally came out, Crash gave the re-release an improved 65%, suggesting they may have been unnecessarily harsh in the first place. A bit like YS with 3D Deathchase, which they unfathomably disliked first time round, the loonies.

21. REDSHIFT (World XXI Soft) 75%



I thought I'd try and mix things up a bit now with one of them there *modern era* Speccy games, just to show that errors can still be made even in this day and age. Redshift is a cracking vertical shooter, previously reviewed on this site a while back and getting a princely 87%. It's fast, it's fun, it's furious and is surely the best shmup (*have I said that right?*) of the modern age. So why oh why oh why did Crash only give it 75%? They're very kind to many an AGD platformer that breaks no new ground, but why not a great shooter, which are relatively rare these days? Come on guys, I know you're better than this...

20. YES, PRIME MINISTER (Mosaic) 56%



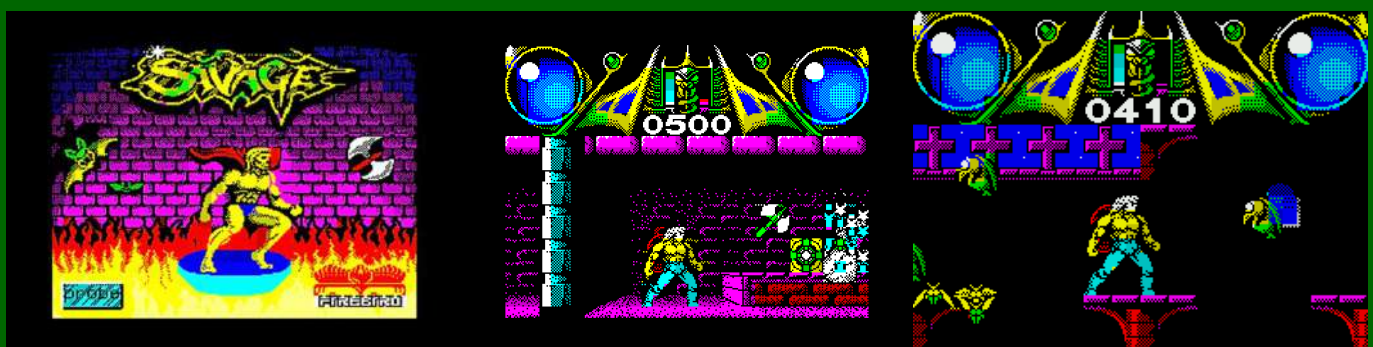
How '80s is this? The sitcom was all the rage for a while and a clever TV time capsule in itself. And this game appears to be an amusing and characterful translation of it onto the Speccy screen. Admittedly it cost nearly £15 (**faints**) but it seemed quite a deep and strategic thing overall, and we know how Crash sometimes disliked those... YS *Megagamed* it and SU thought 8/10 was reasonable. It was surely better than Adrian Mole...

19. AIRWOLF (Elite) 90%



Oh gawd, I think we've said enough about this one recently, let's move on for chrissakes...

18. SAVAGE (Firebird) 74%



I'm 74% surprised that I haven't played this game at any point, as it looks like an early predecessor of Valley Of Rains, which I lurve, with its fantastically colourful graphics and arcade action. If it's anything like that recent Zosya classic, surely this should merit some seriously high ratings. I mean, look at the sprites on it, missus! YS gave it the *Megagame* treatment and SU awarded it a whopping 96% and a shiny *Classic* badge. Crash? 74%. Miserable buggers!

17. ON THE RUN *(Design Design)* 91%



I was just checking my dates on this one, as it looks a little like a not-quite-as-good Nodes Of Yesod, which seems to have come out a mere month or so before On The Run. It seems good enough graphically but the gameplay looks a bit dull perhaps. YS and SU evidently thought so, giving it 6/10 and 3*. We need a tie-breaker. What did the mighty Popular Computing Weekly make of it? Aha, they reckon “*Spectrum users may think they’ve seen it all before*”. Probably just weeks before.

16. BMX SIMULATOR *(Code Masters)* 63%



Ah, this one I used to play A LOT. And no way does it deserve a measly 63%. If there’s one thing the Codies did well, not mentioning any eggy folk, it was multi-player games, and this one was right up there with the best. I can only assume the lonely Crash reviewer couldn’t rustle up any fwiends to play this with, as it was a blast in my book. But even YS only rated it 7/10, so leave it to SU to be the only ones to speak sense with a 5* review. God bless the Unclear ones!

15. PENTAGRAM *(Ultimate)* 93%



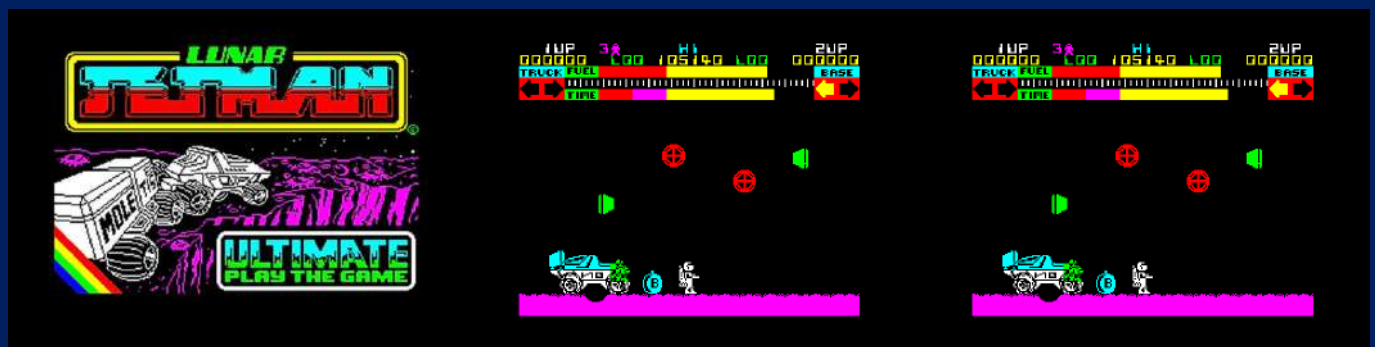
Ultimate were unstoppable from the birth of the Spectrum up to, say 1985. But by the middle of '86 things had changed. After the miracle of Knight Lore, they played a very similar tune with Alien 8, Nightshade, Gunfight, then this. Crash risked ridicule by giving it such a high score, while the other mags could see the writing on the wall, YS preferring 7/10 and SU going for 3*. Lowly stuff, but I think much more realistic on the whole.

14. DOUBLE DRAGON *(Melbourne House)* 64%



So we'd had the glory of Target; Renegade and all its associated punctuation in 1988. Then a year later we got this arcade conversion which had its similarities. Like T;R, you could play with your mate and team up to smash the AI baddies, and like T;R it was rather good fun doing so. Admittedly it wasn't on a par with the semi-coloned marvel, but it seemed a better game than this mark indicates. Having said that, SU gave it 51%, but I think YS hit the spot more with an 8/10.

13. LUNAR JETMAN (Ultimate) 95%



Oh no, the Ultimate anti-love-in continues! I think there are mitigating circumstances for this one in all fairness. It was Crash's first issue, the general quality of software wasn't great in 1983, and so Ultimate's early titles seemed that much more amazing. This game always looked great but played like a dog, the difficulty level much too high for most mortals. Other mags declined to give it a rating due to them being rubbish, but Crash went big on it, also bizarrely giving it *100% Value For Money*. Not sure how that works, also not sure how it didn't get *Game Of The Month* (in pre-Smash) days when 3D Deathchase grabbed that with a lower score of 92%. Ah, the early days...

12. CHAMPIONSHIP SPRINT (Electric Dreams) 44%



Crash's aversion to good clean multiplayer fun continued with this abjectly low score for Super Sprint's admittedly hugely similar sequel. It largely amounted to more tracks for the original game – kind of a *“Super Sprint: The Deeper Dungeons”*, but that was often good enough in them days. YS were marginally more impressed, opining 6/10, but SU were in pole position this time round with 7/10. I still think it merits another one point myself, as there's plenty of fun in this game to justify an 80% score. Unless you don't like fun, of course.

11. ZOIDS (Martech) 96%



I think I used to have a Zoid at one point which you wound up, let go and watched as it fell over. Nowadays it sounds like a nasty complaint, but they were very big in the '80s for a good 10 seconds. And this game was probably decent enough, with YS also declaring it a *Megagame* and SU going for a more sober 8/10. But is it really worthy of this level of adulation? Such a dizzying score would rank it among the top ten Spectrum games of all time ever, and let's face it, it doesn't really belong there.

10. ATV SIMULATOR (Code Masters) 66%



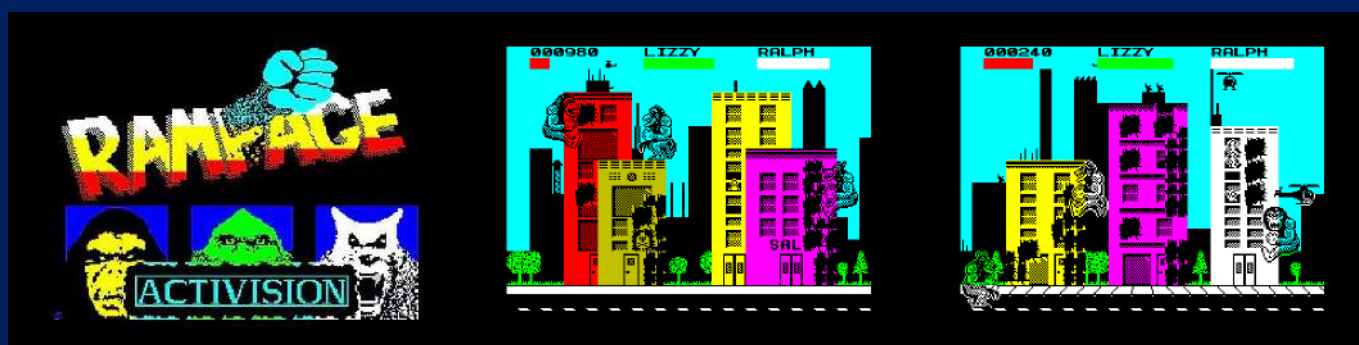
I'm in danger of sounding like a broken record here, but this was a seriously enjoyable 2 player game, and quite an original one to boot. It's rather like those Trials bike riding games they've done for a while on Playstations – trying to go the appropriate speed to get over the various obstacles in your way. It was great fun in 2 player mode, not much surpassing the amusement of seeing your rival flying off their ATV and through the air, landing in great pain. SU also thought 6/10, the numpties, while YS were a bit nearer with 8/10.

9. RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER *(Imagine)* 91%



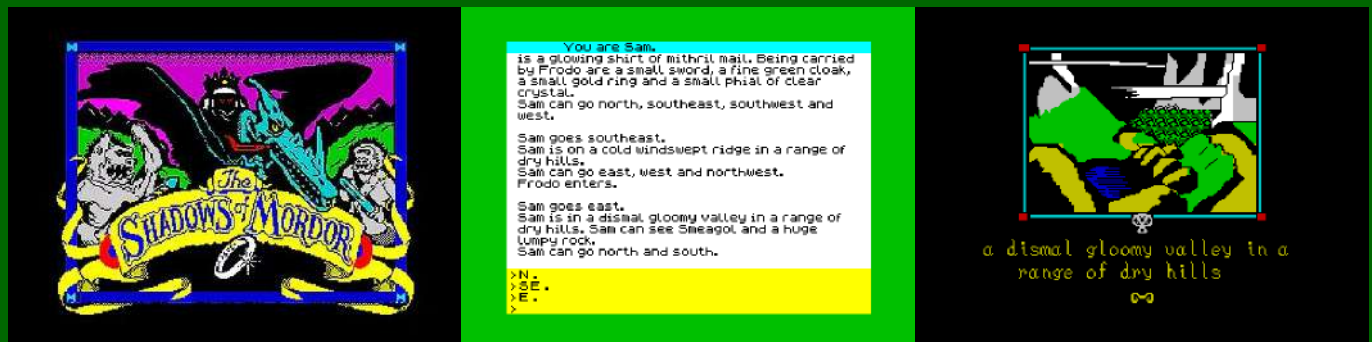
I suppose everything's relative. By 1989 the software market wasn't what it had been in the glory days of yore (*Sinclair*) and maybe this game was ahead of most others of the time. But pretty much everyone has slagged it off good style as it certainly doesn't hold a candle to its illustrious predecessors. It's not much of a looker either, so it seems that the other mags' scores of 79% (YS) and 71% (SU) were surely the more accurate at the time. Ohhhhhh Rene...

8. RAMPAGE *(Activision)* 69%



Oh man, Rampage was ace! What other game could you play where you and 2 mates (*not just one, two*) could play as huge monsters destroying a city and eating as many humans as you could manage? It might have been a bit repetitive after a while, but the amount of fun involved was immense. But hold on, this must be a fault on my part, as even the other two rags only gave it 6/10s. Frankly they're all completely wrong and must be made to pay! I hereby claim the last word on the subject.

7. THE SHADOWS OF MORDOR *(Melbourne House)* 93%



Alright, it's time for me to get personal on Crash's arses here. As a massive fan of The Hobbit once upon a time, I had high hobbit expectations for this game, despite not having played The Fellowship Of The Ring in between them. The graphics looked nice and Crash gave it a hugely impressive score, even if YS (8/10) and SU (3*) didn't quite back them up on it. I bought it, I tried to play it, it was total unplayable orc \$h1t. Putting a ludicrous maze in right at the start ended the experience very early for me. It had me less singing about gold, more ranting and raving like a demented balrog.

6. ARKANOID *(Imagine)* 59%



It's surprising that Crash took such a dislike to Arkanoid, since its deadly rival in the field was Batty, which was Your Sinclair's champion really, since it came free with one of their issues. I've always marginally preferred Batty to this game, but there really isn't much in it, and both were great fun back in the day. YS called it a *Megagame*, SU called it a *Classic* and Crash called it a "meh". Pretty hard to explain really, it's not even a 2-player Code Masters game or anything...

5. FAT WORM BLOWS A SPARKY (Durell) 95%



It's a good thing to be original. And also to be quirky. This game certainly came out of leftfield and seemed to be well liked by many at the time. It's probably my bad that I've only first played it a few weeks back, and the intervening decades have probably not been kind to it. I really can't see what the attraction is, I couldn't get into it at all. SU were with me, only giving it 3*, but YS sided with Crash, calling it a *Megagame* too. It's made this list due to just how far into the 90s it got – again surely the Newsfield boys had a sugar rush on when reviewing this one.

4. GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR (Code Masters) 42%



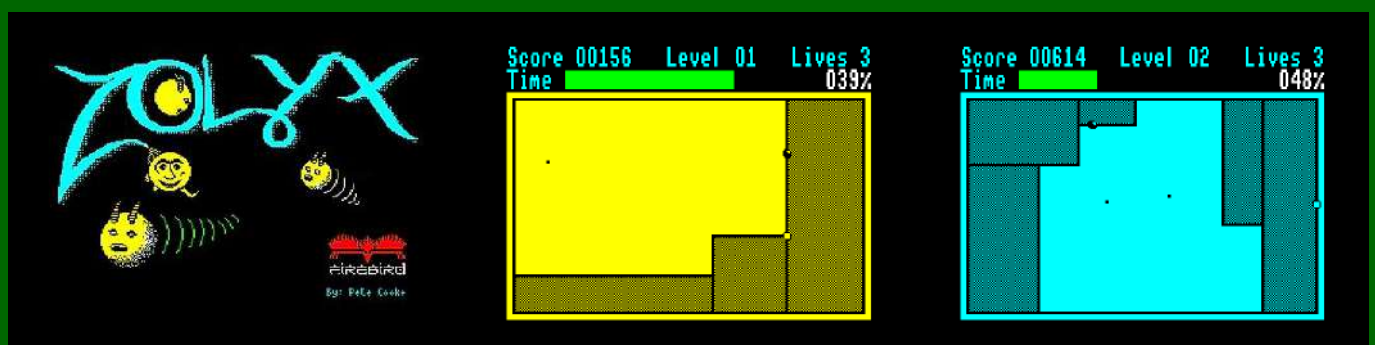
We've pretty much been over this ground already, but I do remember being quite shocked when I saw this score after playing and thoroughly enjoying this multiplayer classic. It's not like they took a bit of a dislike to it, they *really* really hated it! Let's check for sanity elsewhere: 7/10 from YS and a much-more-like-it 8/10 in SU. This one really is a nasty blot on Crash's mostly pristine copybook. Whatever a copybook is.

3. KENTILLA (*Micromega*) 10/10



Ooh, the unpleasant spectre of favouritism rears its ugly head here, something that has been pointed out by many over the years. Derek Brewster of course was Chief Wizard of the Adventure Trail in Crash for quite some time, as well as making a number of Spectrum games himself. Some were well received, like Velnor's Lair and Codename Mat, while towards the end of the Spectrum's lifetime, he seemed to program rather too many dubious arcade budget efforts. I've played Kentilla, and while it's not a bad little affair, there's no way it's perfection itself. SU thought 6/10 was right, and I'm inclined to agree, with YS going one lower. Maybe they weren't big fans of the anorak look.

2. ZOLYX (*Firebird*) 14%



Surely this is just plain nasty. Pete Cooke wrote this. PETE COOKE! Author of many ground-breaking games. He went all budgety in the late '80s, but he still did some really good stuff even then. Crash even *Smashed* his previous budget puzzler, Brainstorm! But they reckoned this game was great on the C64 (*spit, spit*) but a terrible conversion to the Speccy. As far as I'm concerned, it's a simple but effective concept overall. YS were non-committal with 5/10 but SU thought it was well worth 8/10. Nick Roberts even reckoned it looked like a programmer's first effort on a ZX81! Wonder if he realised who actually wrote it...

1. TECHNICIAN TED (Hewson) 96%



Maybe it's me, since I did name Jet Set Willy as my favourite Spectrum game of all time. Nearly a year after the release of JSW came Ted, apparently a technician. Even the title doesn't do it for me, sounds kinda boring. Yes, the loader is extraordinary but once you've got over that, I don't see anything remarkable about this game at all. It's ludicrously difficult, you've got millions of lives which suggests the programmers knew just how hard it was, and the whole thing is not even slightly up to the standard of Matthew Smith's classic. But Crash adored it, saying *"the graphics certainly surpass those seen in JSW and MM"*, which I can't agree with. They loved it to bits but to me it just seems like a quite polished, but fairly generic clone. Wonder what the others said, since clearly I must be wrong! Well they both gave it 7/10, a not unreasonable conclusion. I guess this game really is the definition of Marmite (*except it's not strictly a savoury spread in a jar*). Users on Spectrum Computing were mostly split between 6/10 and 9/10, averaging out to 7.3. Maybe this proves that opinions really are like a-holes and each to his own etc. Still, it'd be boring if we all liked the same thing, eh? Cliche, cliché...

**HOPE THAT'S BEEN SOME INTERESTING AND/OR CONTROVERSIAL
READING...**

**DESPITE THESE 50 EXAMPLES, CRASH IS UNDOUBTEDLY THE G.O.A.T. AND
RULES FOREVER, AMEN!**

**IF YOU DISAGREE AT ALL, WHICH YOU WILL, PLEASE DO COMMENT AND
START YOUR OWN HEATED DEBATE :)**

- FIN -

BLADE RUNNER (C.R.L., 1985) &

WAR OF THE WORLDS (C.R.L., 1984)

Looking at two of science fiction's most outstanding moments now, and how C.R.L. made a mockery of them. Well that's the popular opinion at least. Or is it? Some liked them, more on that story later. And I'll try my best not to pre-judge, honest I will.

Blade Runner is one of the best movies ever. Fact. Despite being somewhat overlooked at the time of its release, it was later rightly revered and was solely responsible for cyberpunkery as we know it. C.R.L. bravely acquired the game rights... but wait, as the cover hilariously admits, they swung yet missed. This is the game of the **Vangelis** soundtrack, not the film itself! So how does a Speccy version of a sultry saxophone soundtrack play out?

Well it starts out not unreasonably. A colourful load screen and a semi-bearable **Wham! The Music Box tune**, which ain't Vangelissy even slightly. Then you press a key and define your... keys. Even that process is slow, this doesn't bode well. Oh wait, the plot. It's da future and androids are killing humans in revenge for us being a-holes to them generally. You're a cop who has to 'retire' them asap. And if it's like the flick, the future should be neony, Geisha-y and wet as heck. I'm sure C.R.L. bore all this in mind...

First you have an overhead map of the various sectors of the city and the replicants... ah no, wait, I mean the tunes whistled by replicants, which need to be silenced. So far, so swish. Cut to street cam and we see a 'skimmer' (*for the noise made by one anyway*) slowly descending to the ground. So slowly. So. Slowly. It's tedious yet unimpressive. And get used to it, 'cos it happens A LOT!

Once you wake up it becomes apparent that you're meant to guide your oddly bald blade running man through the foot traffic, close enough to put some lead into the '**replidroid**'. But most of the time you just run into pedestrians and fall on your futuristic behind. Then eventually come round and try again. At first this seems a bit hard, but once you realise you can mostly run down the road unhindered instead, it's actually quite easy. I did it six times but for no apparent reward. Wait, this can't be the whole game. Can it? Surely not, let me check some of the reviews to see where I'm going wrong.

Crash concluded 58%, saying C.R.L. had made a hash of it, though one of the three reviewers reckoned it was "*nearly excellent*", presumably after a heavy lunch at the pub. **YS** thought 7/10 was about right and **SU** gave it 3 stars. I can't explain either of those. And none of the reviews revealed any further facets to the game. As such surely this is one of the most limited games of all time? I don't see how anyone could excuse it personally.



*Quite a moody pic, plus green fireworks.
So far, not bad*

*The skimmer descends agonisingly.
Incidentally, Space Doubt never came
'oubt', on the Speccy at least*



*Don't get your replidroids mixed up with
your cyberneers, or who knows what will
happen*

*Quick, the 'replidroid' is nearly shootable
from here. "Get to the diner!"
(Commando)*



"No-one would have believed in the last years of the 20th century that C.R.I. would obtain two precious licences and squander them so utterly." Surely they could do some justice to **H.G. Wells'** sci-fi classic? There's certainly enough to work with, though I notice again that their rights are only to Jeff Wayne's musical version of same, which nevertheless also had its moments.

You must make your way through **Woking** and its suburbs to find your gal Carrie and escape the Martian heat rays. Interesting fact: I've been to Woking and they've got a huge statue of an alien tripod in the town centre, and it's ace. Didn't see any Mercury Wells around though. I can't believe I'm leaving that in...

There's a painfully slow intro, though you can't deny its literary chops as it's the first page or so of the novel. Then the aliens attack in a textualised (*not sexualised*) way. You can choose to flee or get zapped, not a difficult choice. Then begins the graphical majesty of this game. You're a stick man (*for chrissakes*) and you walk jerkily across the screen. For screen after screen.

You occasionally stop to pick up bread. Urgh, **road bread**. Or wine. Now that's a different matter. You can consume these to build your strength, and get wasted so you don't care any more about the aliens. If it's evening you can go and sleep in any open-doored houses. That's all you can do apart from go up or down a road every now and then.

Easily the best part of the game is when an alien machine finds you. The graphic for it is quite good, but it just spits out lasers near you, which are easily avoided. So you escape and the tedium continues.

Like Blade Runner there's not nearly enough going on here. If there were more elements to the game and much better execution, that would help. But as it is, it's a real, presumably rushed, wasted opportunity. **C.R.I.** did do better stuff certainly, but with these two they let themselves down, they let us down and they let the whole school down. For shame.

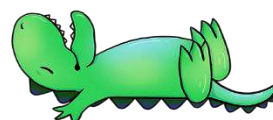
SCI-FI DOOMSDAY RECKONING

BLADE RUNNER

38%

WAR OF THE WORLDS

36%





OK this is really good, think loading screens are Nigel's thing

Beautiful Isleworth. Look, wine in the road! I'd go out more if it was like this



Ah here's the good bit. All it does is zap a bit near you though

Woah, which stick man am I now, stuck in this L.S. Lowry painting?





It's a bit like Whitby on Goth Weekend

I wish, I wish... for a great big fish



I remember these cars from the '80s. Think it's a Fiat, though it looks a bit Lada-y too

You pick up caricature postcards randomly as you go, including Sir Clive at one point



THE DOOM OF THE POND

(Furillo Productions, 2021)

Oh man, but do these guys do some whacky stuff! Sometimes they dabble in multiple choice adventuring, like the recent *The Dark Veil*. Sometimes they do vaguely arcade-adventurey things like *Federation Z* and its soggy follow-up *Federation Underwater*, both of which show promise, but end up being pretty odd. Then there's the oddest-looking of them all, *The Void Bringer*, which I'm saving for a later time. Needless to say it looks batshit loopy.

I've noticed one thing about their games though. They often include little sub-games where you fight an opponent by just tapping a key as fast as you can. The same is true here. I think the *Furillo* boys are more adventurers at heart, not quite so up on the arcade side of things.

Anyway *The Doom Of The Pond* looks highly unique. It's another multiple choice affair but with rather an attractive interface, with a few more options than you'd normally expect. Though not quite as many as a *Wilson/Hogarth* quest of old thankfully. It sounds good too with constantly playing tunes. This is the sort of stuff we like!

Best check the plot belatedly. It's set in *Bernard Valley (who?)* in the retro-tastic year of 1980. You play *Peter Parrish (Spiderman?)* and you are callously abandoning your two unwanted pet turtles, *Arroyito* and *Pozolon (I'd call mine Gamera if I had one)* in the village pond. Sounds bizarre enough, but clearly things are about to go seriously wrong for *Peter* in a *B-Movie/Swamp Thing* stylee.

It all starts off very promisingly. *Furillo* excel in the graphics department and the presentation is so good, things are off to a flyer. Yet there aren't many options, the main ones being *Search/Get*, *Give/Use*, *Eat/Drink* and movement directions. But it's



What lighthouse? Why eagle's nest? Where chain? Ah, I hate adventures

*Bob Ross combined with Daley Thompson.
Terrifyingly fluffy hair*



*Quentin Tarantino's last few films were duds
and he went to live in a cave*

*Well at least it's quite a pretty place to die.
Apart from the smell...*



quite nice to have things simplified for you for a change. Now to wander around and take in the fetid stench of *The Pond*.

Be prepared to die a lot. If you don't dig dying, this game ain't for you. It's pretty much a death lottery when you choose which path to take. Not quite heads or tails but not far off it. This seems a shame as most of the 'fun' of an adventure is being able to wander around freely to start with, before tackling any actual problems. No such luck at *The Pond*, it's a *harsh tarskmarstar* and no mistake.

I got to a certain point after dying umpteen (*I counted them*) times, but the game then insisted I defeat 7 monsters in battle before going any further. Bit annoying, but I gave it a crack as the game handily grants you a 'Monster Hunt' icon as well. So you press fire as fast as *Daley* ever could, over and over. But sometimes the creatures just flee, and sometimes you lose, and therefore die, for no discernible reason. Only occasionally do you accidentally snare one.

And it was at this point that I gave up for now. I've ended up feeling a bit disappointed with this game as it promises so much and really looks like an entertaining twist on the adventure genre. Reminds me a bit of *Star Heritage* which I reviewed waaaaay back in Part 2 of this site. With some tweaking here and there it could be great, but as it is, I found it too frustrating. Let's hope Furillo go again and work on this idea to produce something even better.

POND-LIFE PERCENTAGE

7.8%



A tale of what might have been. All set up for a great fun time, but not quite getting there in my book.

KOSMOS ***(Atlantis, 1989) &***

MOONTORC ***(Atlantis, 1991)***

Atlantis' fortunes took a turn for the better when due to an admin error, they accidentally employed 3 people with the same surname - Shaws Graham, David and Adrian. It's just lucky they got along great and worked well together, producing the awesome, if unreleased until much later, **Hop 'N' Chop**, amongst others. In your face Oliver Twins, feel outnumbered!

Save the Skwibbles! That's the point of Kosmos in case you're wondering, as there's some serious Trouble With Tr... er, Skwibbles. Cruel aliens have colonised the planet Kosmos and hunted these poor fluffballs to near extinction, and sadly they don't breed like their Tribbly near-namesakes. A mere four of them remain and you must save them, keep them alive, repair your crashed spaceship and return them safely to live on Earth. Where the atmosphere will probably kill them.

What a fun plot. Shame the Kosmosians are a-holes and want to kill you. So begins a pseudo Magic Knight type of arcade adventure in space (*Knight Tyme then?*) as you have to use objects as you go, while constantly watching your back as the enemies don't let you rest for long. You've only got so much oxygen too before you kick the bucket, literally in a nice little animation come game over time.

This is a very presentable budget game with bags of character and cute colourful graphics. Most actions produce a bizarre little comment at the bottom of the screen to keep you amused, such as suggesting '*Pickling a Skwibble*' which is surely not quite the idea! It's playable but still challenging and charming enough to draw you in for one more go.



The graphics are great in this game. The load screen less so

You've picked up all 4 Skwibbles, their health shown at the top right



A quick tourist trip to Jodrell Bank breaks up the action nicely

Probably the oddest message in the game!



Two years later in 1991, which was surely just the other day, the Shaws made another one for Atlantis, called **Moontorc**. Dragonorc in space maybe? *"Get your spacesuit on, Maroc. For an adventure that's out of this world..."* I know Hewson did **Astroclone** but my idea is definitely better.

Nah, this is more like a *'hey nonny no'* frolic in the forests of merry old England. It even plays Greensleeves on the menu screen, like so many games of yore (like **Hunchback** I think, but I'm not prepared to play it again just to check), only this rendition is actually pretty tuneful, so props for that.

It's the oldest tale in the book. You have to rescue a princess from an evil Dark Lord. 3 Moontorc pieces have to be obtained on each of 4 levels, to give to a tollman at the end of each (like the Mersey Tunnel). You can buy keys, weapons and spells from traders here and there. Yes, this paragraph is quite dull.

But it's the execution and presentation where Los Shawses really excel. Everything looks so purty, with great sound and colour to the fore. And it's highly playable and full of more fun than is reasonable for such a cheapo game. It's like a cute mini version of **Firelord** meets **Exolon** meets **Robin Of The Wood**. And no, I can't explain any of that, it's just a feeling I get. Good work for Shaws!

THE LOST CITY OF THE SCORES

KOSMOS

84%

MOONTORC

83%





Ah good, this screen is a bit more like it, Shaws!

Open the blue door if you have a key, kill the fairies then hang with the wizard



Our hero is tripping balls after chewing a piece of the enormous 'shroom he's standing on

Urgh, quick, go out of the screen again to avoid that flying snot ball





Great screen here, though Snakey might want to see the doctor about those coloured spots

Level 6 is not one for those of a claustrophobic nature



From egg to apple, level 8 needs you to fill that gap in the middle somehow

Snakey laughs as he's finally sussed level 5 after 50 goes



SNAKE ESCAPE *(Einar Saukas, 2016)* &

CAPTAIN DREXX *(Vladimir Burenko, 2014)*

Oh wow, I've just found out that Spectral legend Mr. **Einar Saukas** is from Brazil, not Russia where most modern day ZX heroes hail from. I wonder how he got into the Speccy scene, I had no idea it reached that far. Although I did spot someone from **Angola** checking out this site the other day amazingly. Hello to you if you're reading now! Einar's probably from Croydon now isn't he, and *Spectrum Computing* have sold me a fast one...

Anyway he needs no introduction, apart from that terrible one above (*sorry Einar*). This game is a puzzler he made back in 2016, apparently his take on the game **Lime Rick** by Tommi Tuovinen, a Finnish rally driver possibly. The things you find out when you need some goss for your reviews.

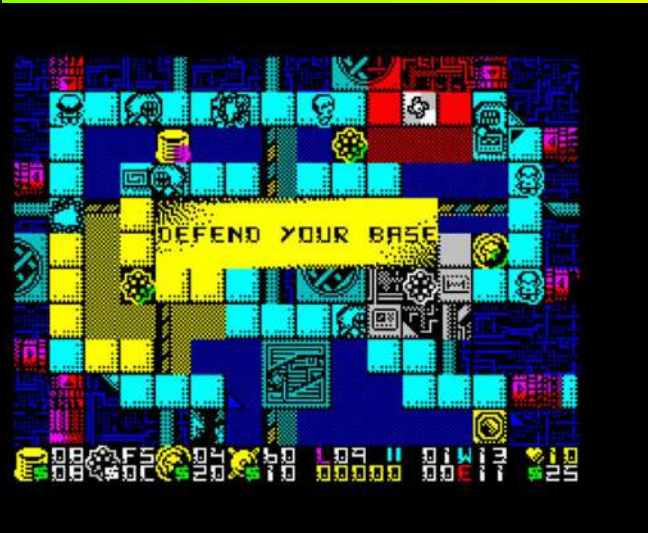
Can't see an inlay anywhere, okay. Let's say your name is Stiletto Snake (*thanks Jack*), you're a snake and you like to eat apples. But sometimes they're really hard to get to. So you have to use your body as a snaking ladder to get higher up, like the opposite of the popular board game. You can only go a maximum of 2 blocks up in the air before your face goes red from all that stretching and you have to recoil in horror (*not sure if that's a joke or not*).

It's a whole heap of serpentine fun, this one. The multi-colour graphics are cute, the various tunes from good old **MmcM** as cracking as ever, and it's highly addictive and frustrating in equal measures, as all good puzzle games should be. You could say it's a tad one dimensional I suppose, but it's certainly got a lot more to it than that snakey game of old called **Snake**, simplistic classic though that was. Can we stop talking about snakes now please?



*Swoon, it's the dreamy Captain Pexx...
sorry, Drex...*

The intro is vital and manages to make sense of all those symbols and numbers below



*Aliens come from the left, get hit by your
yellow towers, but one is nearly through,
look!*

Level 3 sees the aliens taking an unnecessarily convoluted route



Snakes alive, it's **Captain Drex**! This effort scooped 4th place in the Retro Games Battle of 2014, which I remember not at all. This may not sound overwhelmingly impressive to some, so who beat it then, let's see? Ah, **Metal Man Reloaded**, **Dreamwalker: Alter Ego** and **Castlevania: Spectral Interlude**. No wonder it didn't beat those, its title is way too short and has no colons. Still, an awesome line-up - what a time to be alive that was!

Wossit all about then? Well you're the buff Captain who's trying to defend his space base from "*spongers, munchers, robotrons and greasy things*" the inlay informs us. By building towers and heaving them into position using his throbbing... muscles. Our mighty macho man has to work quickly though as a seemingly endless conveyor belt of alien scums (*like a more evil The Generation Game*) are on the warpath to penetrate his area. I know, I need to stop.

You can buy a tower for \$8 which seems a snip. But you can only get another one once you've earned more space spondulix by destroying the baddies. Not too sure cash really needs to be involved in this game, with space exchange rates confusing matters, but never mind. Upgrading your towers up to the power of 4 can be done gradually once you've earned enough pocket money.

Tower defence. Doesn't sound that exciting, but I have to say this game is **BRILLIANT**! Once you've grasped the basics, which does take a short while. But there's a very helpful intro to explain it all, and you can pause the alien onslaught at any time while you get your bearings, which is a real lifesaver. It's hard as heck but riotously addictive and maddening. To add to this, it looks great, is hugely colourful and has awesome music and sound effects. This one's a revelation to me - download it now and tell me I'm wrong!

PUZZLING PERCENTAGES



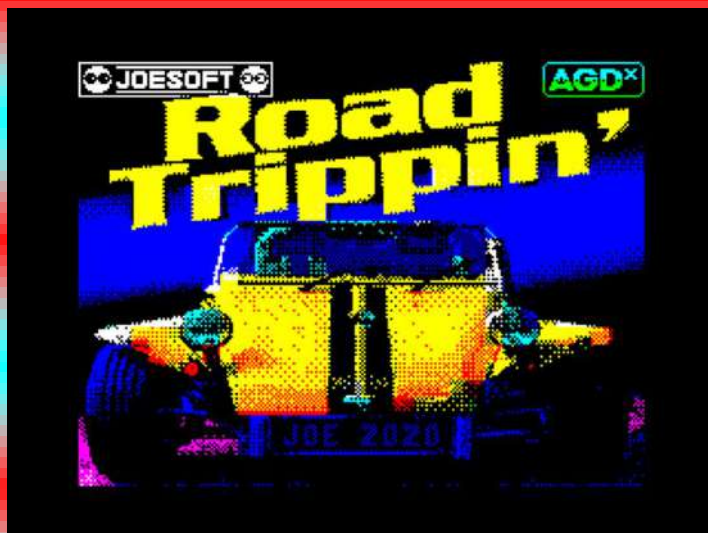
SNAKE ESCAPE

87%

CAPTAIN DREXX

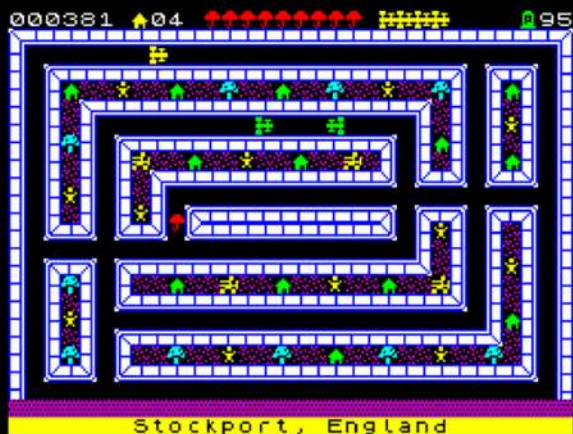
92%





Get in there, Clivey boy!

***Ah beautiful Marikina. I'd imagine.
You're the yellow car, go get the red
thing***



***And now... Stockport. It was in Energy
Warrior, now it's in this!***

***It's Hollyweird, so you have to pick up
film clapperboards obviously***



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 1:

TEAM ROAD TRIPPIN'!

ROAD TRIPPIN'

(Joesoft, 2020)

In this game you play a millionaire, I'd imagine, who has the luxury of going on the road trip of a lifetime, visiting exotic locations around the globe and picking up tacky souvenirs. Fridge magnets are always a favourite. Trouble is, everywhere you go, the locals are insane drivers and want to kill you. It's based on real life clearly.

Paul Davies got our mate Clive to do the load screen, paying him in balaclavas. The game itself is a bit like **Pac-Man** in that you have to duck and dive to avoid the ghosts, played here by cars, while trying to grab a few pills, played here by souvenirs. You occasionally pick up something that makes the enemies freeze, which comes as quite a relief.

There's some nice loopy music and it's all very colourful and jolly. The graphics are tiny but they're alright. It reminds me a little of **Run Baby Run**, that cheap but cheerful Firebird title of old. Not bad for a little tinker, even if it doesn't quite live up to the promise of the load screen.

ROAD TRIPPIN' SCORE:

5.5 / 10



I'm a bit worried that bag's gonna decapitate this poor guy

Skeggie's never looked so bright and breezy



In Great Yarmouth, if the fast food doesn't kill you, the sharks will

Hunstanton. No, I've no idea either. Looks rad though



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 1:

TEAM ROAD TRIPPIN'!

ROAD TRIPPIN' 2022: COAST TO COAST

(Joesoft, 2022)

Having tired of life on the road, you've come back home and fancy some more local and eco-friendly adventuring for a change, around Blighty's crumbling seaside resorts. You've got your moddy scooter all fired up and stinking of petrol, and now you must grab your stick of rock, and fish 'n' chips without the locals eating you.

This is kinda like the unofficial Speccy version of old BBC classic **Daredevil Dennis**. You work your way across the screen, then gradually down the screen, jumping obstacles, avoiding things and varying your speed regularly, as sometimes slow and steady gets you less decapitated.

I do like this. It's obscenely addictive, frequently frustrating, but a huge heap of holiday... erm, fun. Slamming round Skegness on your scooter, jumping over chippies, ducking under seagulls - we've all been there. How much more British could you get? Maybe crank up "Peaches" by **The Stranglers** while you play.

ROAD TRIPPIN' 2022 SCORE: 7.5 / 10

OVERALL TEAM SCORE: 13 / 20

POSITION: 5th out of 5



A Krafty little load screen, this one

Waffles... Apple face guy... we're definitely in... Spain



How many C5 owners suffered this inevitable fate?

Hot croissants... fine wines... but we haven't got far - this is clearly Blackpool



5 TEAM CHALLENGE – ROUND 2:

TEAM MORITZ!

MORITZ ON THE AUTOBAHN

(Sebastian Braunert, 2020)

Moritz the dog has procured himself a **Sinclair C5** somehow, so what better than a hazardous road trip across Europe to go visit his cousin Mortiz in Portugal? He can jump quite admirably in Sir Clive's nemesis, a hitherto unknown feature which could have saved the whole Sinclair empire if only we'd known about it earlier.

I suspect this game is mostly just an excuse for the author to indulge his love of **Kraftwerk**, not that there's anything wrong with that. The load screen is an amusing take on the '*Man Machine*' album cover, and **Pedro Pimenta** supplies an ace rendition of '*Autobahn*' as in-game choonage. Pretty nice and most efficient.

It's surprisingly good fun jumping on waffles in Belgium, cuckoo clocks in Switzerland, Eiffel Towers in France and braving the crazy German drivers on the autobahn itself. Platforming with a cute sense of humour. What's not to enjoy?

MORITZ ON THE AUTOBAHN SCORE:

6.5 / 10



*Are they scissors on the right?
Why?*

*I think that's Jurgen himself. Or
Gerald Sinstadt*



*"Sinclair United... they're by far
the greatest team... the world has
ever seen"*

*Not sure who this is. And I've just
noticed the subliminal
advertising in this game. "Must
go buy Crash"...*



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 2:

TEAM MORITZ!

MORITZ THE STRIKER

(Sebastian Braunert, 2020)

Hey, I never knew good old Moritz was a **Liverpool** fan. Jurgen Klopp, who I share a birthday with, is short of good players (*no comments please*) so he has asked a dog to help. Well, it's been that sort of a season.

Moritz has to dribble his way through 20 footballly levels, to eventually score at the Kop End and sign for LFC. First he has to fetch the ball ("*Good doggie, go fetch, there's a good boy*" etc.), then shoot at a flag or knock a switch depending, to remove the goalie magically, then score in the open goal, like **Ronny Rosenthal** couldn't.

Them sprites be chonky in this game. Not many to a screen unlike the last game, but they're well drawn and characterful. Instead of losing a life, you get a yellow card. But the ref must be having a 'mare, as you get to clock up 7 or so of them before he eventually sends you off! Oh, and it plays '**Zombie Nation**' when you complete a level. That's class, that.

MORITZ THE STRIKER SCORE: 7 / 10

OVERALL TEAM SCORE: 13.5 / 20

POSITION: 4th out of 5



***YEAH, IT'S NOT THE BEST LOAD
SCREEN IN THE WORLD***

***SARGE MUST BE ON STEPS TO JUMP
FIVE TIMES HIS HEIGHT. HUT HUT!***



***THINGS GET CHILLY AND BLOCKY
FOR SARGE ON LEVEL 2***

***SARGE IS KNOCKED OUT BY THIS
REFUGEE'S GOOD LOOKS***



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 3:

TEAM SGT. HELMET!

SGT. HELMET ZERO

(UBHRES, 2009)

"WAR, HURH, GOOD GOD, WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?" AS THE IMMORTAL JAMES BROWN ONCE QUERIED. SERGEANT HELMET, BORN TO SOLDIERING, HAS TO GO ON A MANLY MISSION TO FREE 40 REFUGEES FROM THE EVIL GRUNGE WIZARDS AND THEIR SHAMBLY PLAID ARMY. WELL, HE'S THE ONE WHO LIKES TO SHOOT HIS GUNS, BUT HE KNOWS NOT WHAT IT MEANS.

AND I SAY YEAH. OKAY, FOCUS. THOSE CRAZY MOJO DUDES ARE BEHIND THIS, SO IT'S A SURPRISE THERE ARE NO NAKED WOMEN ANYWHERE. EXCEPT FOR THE REFUGEES WHO ARE QUITE GLAMOROUS IN THEIR SWIMSUITS. ALL TOTALLY NORMAL.

THIS GAME REALLY BEGS TO BE PLAYED. YOUR FELLA BOMBS ALONG MERRILY, SHOOTING HIS INFINITE BULLETS AT LITTLE MINE THINGS, DOING PRETTY IMPRESSIVE JUMPS AND RESCUING THOSE SWIMSUIT MODELS. IT'S EASY TO PICK UP AND TO DO ALRIGHT IN, GRAPHICS ARE GOOD AND COLOURFUL WITH A NICE BEEPY TUNE RINGING IN SARGE'S EARS ALL THE WHILE (HE GOT TOO CLOSE TO A GRENADE BLAST ONCE). WORTH A LOT MORE THAN ZERO IN MY EYES.

SGT. HELMET ZERO SCORE: **8 / 10**



***JOIN THE ARMY AND HANG WITH
UGLY DUDES***

***HELMET MUST ROLL THAT BOULDER
ONTO THE ENEMY SOLDIER.
BUNDLE!***



***THAT MOTORBIKE LOOKS INTACT TO
ME. UNLESS IT'S SPLIT STRAIGHT
DOWN THE MIDDLE***



***HELMET IS SUFFERING FROM PTSD
AND SHOOTS ALL HIS OWN MEN IN
HIS DISORIENTATED STATE***



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 3:

TEAM SGT. HELMET!

SGT. HELMET: TRAINING DAY

(MOJON TWINS, 2013)

OK, THIS EXTRAORDINARY TEXT COMES STRAIGHT FROM THE **MOJONS'** OWN WEBSITE: *"BEFORE HIS ADVENTURING IN KHARTADMOCIA, SGT. HELMET WAS FEELING BORED, ROLLING SNOTS WITH HIS PINKY... HE WAS A PROUD MEMBER OF THE TOP 3 THOUGHTTEST (SIC.) PEOPLE ON EARTH ALONGSIDE CHUCK NORRIS AND KATHLEEN TURNER... AND IN HIS OPINION JUMPING TRAMPOLINES USING JUMPING FLIP FLOPS WAS DEPRESSING..."*

*"...THE VERY DAY HIS PET JIMMY THE LEMUR CAME OF AGE, THE FELLOW WARRIORS HAD SOMETHING FOR HELMET. HE GOT BLINDFOLDED, HIS LIPS **ROUGED** AND DRESSED WITH A CUTE **BLUE** TAFFETA BLOUSE WITH MATCHING SKIRT... HE WAS TOLD "YOU MUST SET 5 BOMBS IN THE COMPUTER, THEN COME BACK TO THE BASE. LIKE?"... HELMET ANSWERED "LIKE"."*

THE GAME CAN'T POSSIBLY LIVE UP TO THAT INSANE INTRODUCTION, BUT IT'S NOT BAD. MORE STANDARD CHURROS FARE THAN THE FIRST GAME, BUT IT'S FUN ENOUGH FOR A WHILE IN A FAIRLY GENERIC WAY. SOUNDS LIKE WE NEED A THIRD GAME WHERE HE GOES FULLY TRANSVESTITE, LIKE KLINGER IN **M*A*S*H*** AND TRIES TO SEDUCE HIS MILITARY COMRADES. WITH HILARIOUS CONSEQUENCES.

SGT. HELMET: TRAINING DAY SCORE: 6 / 10

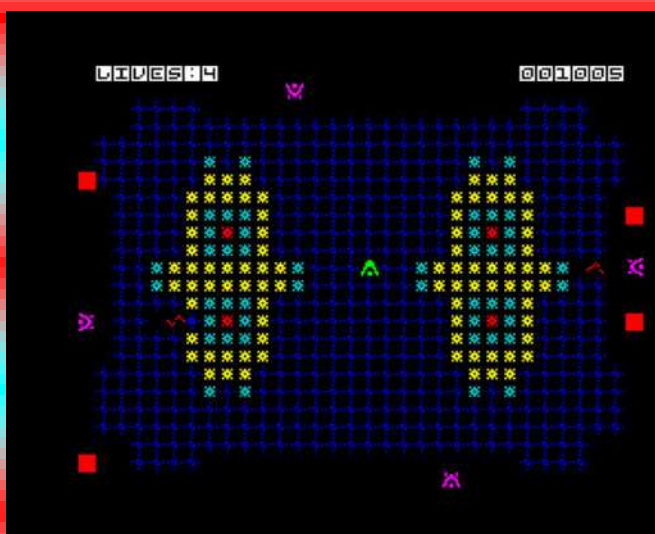
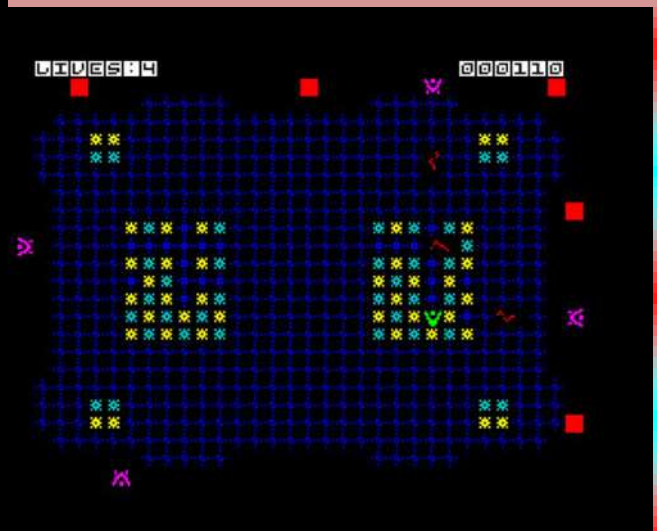
OVERALL TEAM SCORE: 14 / 20

POSITION: 3RD OUT OF 5



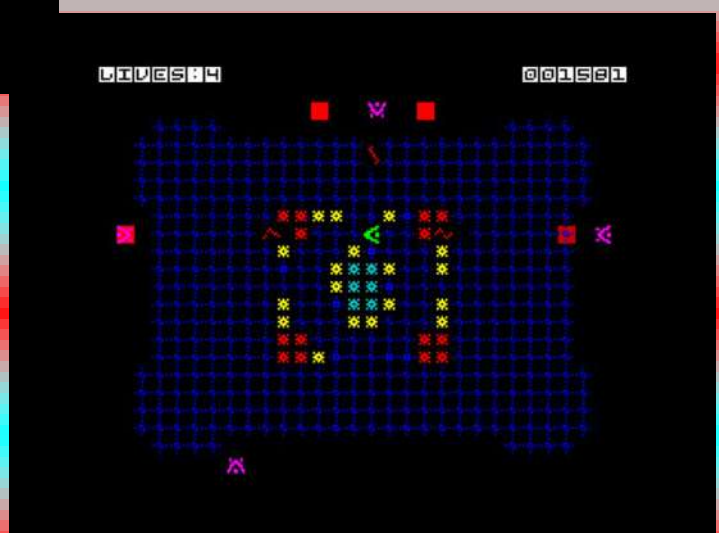
If the guys from the movie Dark Star were to paint their spaceship...

Your li'l green ship needs to move so quickly to avoid them red lasers



Might have guessed Plankton would be behind this

You're briefly safe behind the red bits, but the aliens soon wear them away, the heartless bar stewards



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 4:

TEAM SECTOR!

SECTOR

(RetroSouls, 2013)

The mighty Denis Grachev authored this remake of early Ocean title **Transversion**. Never played it myself, was it anything like Kong? Is this what most of Jeff Minter's games were like then, they seemed very... griddy? Usually with llamas. Anyway, both Sector and Sector Invasion were re-released as a bundle by **Bumfun** (*groan*) in 2016. Handy, as now I've got some English instructions to refer to. Thanks Bumfun! (*cringe*)

Aliens have invaded the shadow quadrant, which is presumably a bad thing. Your little ship has to infiltrate the enemy and steal their mineral resources, buying humanity some time to fight back... in the sequel. (*Looks grimly into the distance muttering "Let's hope we make it to the sequel."*) Sometimes the aliens destroy their own resources themselves while trying to get you. Space-oops!

This is the sort of thing **Denis & The RetroSouls** (*great band*) do so well. A simple idea, not theirs admittedly, done super stylishly with colour and sound turned up to 11. In fact the AY music is quite brilliant, so big up to **Roman Lashkov**. It's a hard little game, but a good larf to play if you've got half an hour, as well as some aliens, to kill.

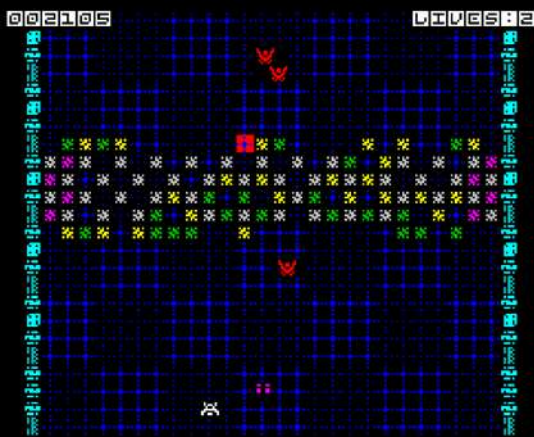
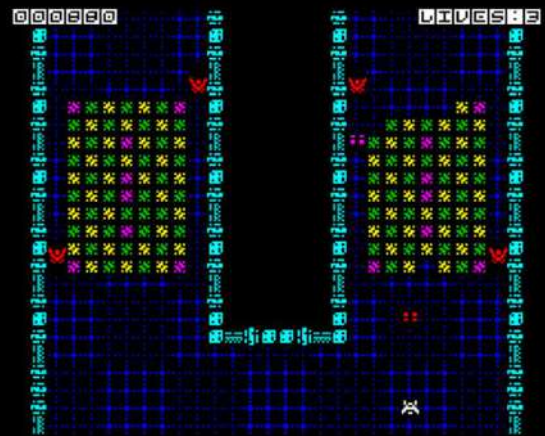
SECTOR SCORE:

7.5 / 10

SECTOR INVASION

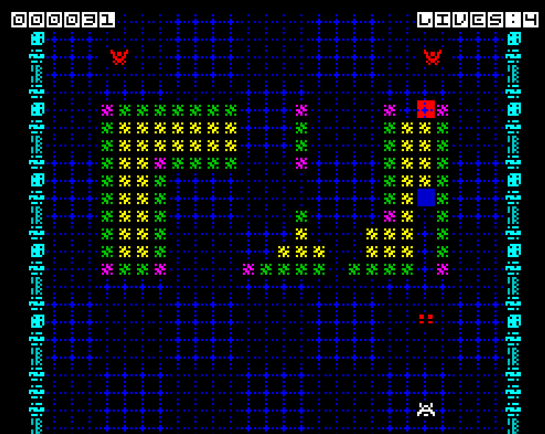
It's Sector Invasion

*Not much room to manoeuvre here
as the red aliens circulate and rain
hell down on your noggin*



*This screen really is like Arkanoid
without balls, but with hangry alien
lifeforms*

Are you eyes going gozzy yet?



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 4:

TEAM SECTOR!

SECTOR INVASION

(RetroSouls, 2014)

You've been promoted out of trouble and now you're part of humanity's attack force against the alien menace. You must destroy their stockpile of minerals, which they've started using as ammo, the scamps, and thus secure a future for mankind. Good job the future for mankind isn't really in my hands, as... well, there'd be no future for mankind.

This time we've got **Arkanoid** meets **Galaxian**. You have to shoot away all the colourful stars, except the red ones which only enemy bullets can destroy, while avoiding their fire into the bargain. It's fast and frantic again, and not as puzzly as these guys' usual offerings, so give your brain the day off.

Graphics = functional. Colour = plentiful. Sound = pretty good, more decent AY **earwormery**, although it breaks up a little in amongst all the gunfire going on. **Sector Invasion** is a nicely presented straightforward thing which ain't half bad.

SECTOR INVASION SCORE: 7 / 10

OVERALL TEAM SCORE: 14.5 / 20

POSITION: 2nd out of 5



Ninjabun graffiti. Wasn't that a movie in the '80s?

Ninjas vs. Pac-Man. We need to make this happen



The temple has some lovely morning star design wallpaper

Welcome to the Magenta Meditation Room. Urgh...



5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 5:

TEAM NJNJAKUL!

NJNJAKUL IN THE A.U.J.C. TEMPLE

(Greenwebsevilla, 2018)

In 2018 the fine folk of Madrid got Real and held a games contest, which in 'RetroSpec-t' (thanks) maybe they shouldn't have. Y'see, a gang of ninjæ (that's the correct plural, I think you'll find) from the Wash & Go Clan (no sorry, the Chun-Go Clan) went and stole all the A.U.J.C.'s dosh (Oliver Townsend blameless on this occasion). The **A.U.J.C.** is a charity to do with old computers possibly (I'm going to start up a charity for those who suffer from having to read too many irritating comments in brackets (Wanna join?))

But heroic **NinjaKul** sets forth for the Temple Of Love to get said readies back. There are 10 actually cute little piggy bank sprites to retrieve. Can he smite the enemies he finds around the place? Shuriken! But his morning stars are restricted so he must also use that Ninja stealth wisely as well (nah). He can do Ninja jumps too, being a Ninja and all. Ninja!

This is a nice bit of fun really. It's a bit like **Tokimal**, albeit not as polished, but that's okay 'cos it was for charadee, mate. Though by no means easy, it is actually possible to finish it, which is a welcome novelty. There's some good ninja tunery playing all the while, and on the whole it's quite the spritely jaunt, as someone posh might say.

NJNJAKUL IN THE A.U.J.C. TEMPLE SCORE: 7/10



Cool screen, and he's such a cutie li'l gny. Aaaaaahhhhhh!

In the prologue, Akul tries in vain to Stop The Express



A cat looks on as Akul needs a mega leap to reach that lever



Ninjas attack, Gangnam style!

5 TEAM CHALLENGE - ROUND 5:

TEAM NJNJAKUL!

NJNJAKUL 2: THE LAST NJNJA

(Pat Morita Team, 2019)

Woah now! Can you really call your game *The Last Ninja* like this? Admittedly the original never had a Speccy release, but even so... Hope Patrick Morita knows some good lawyers. If the game turns out to be any good, it'll draw even more attention to it. Yeeeks.

Akul is the eponymous last ninja in his clan after his brother's death. Pretty rubbish clan then. Might also spoiler the end of the first game, oops. So he wants revenge on those responsible, the Gunshi clan (I hate those guys). He needs 4 scrolls to boost his powers, and there are also 4 levels of Hong Kong to search for them in before he can confront big boss Paco Romita. Did he transfer in from Europe?

This is quite a cunning platformer with a bit of combat thrown in for thrills. It's quite unusual in that you often have to rack your brains to figure out where to go next. I admit I was foxed, but "a *Youtube DJ saved my life*" and showed me the way. Hallelujah! All the game elements you could think of are good, so no-one can have any cause for ninja whingeing.

NJNJAKUL 2: THE LAST NJNJA SCORE: 8 / 10

OVERALL TEAM SCORE: 15 / 20

POSITION: 1st out of 5 – THE WINNERS!

PHANTOM CLUB (Ocean, 1988) & H.A.T.E. (Gremlin Graphics, 1989)

I scoured through quite a few isometric games before I could find two which stand up reasonably well in this day and age that weren't **Head Over Heels**. It was a big mad craze at the time of course, but once the amazement at this novel style of game wore off, how many would still get played? Most seem so slow and quite painful on the whole, and not too many are remembered with much affection, besides the one that started it all of course. Yes, I speak of Scuba Dive. But here's one I'd not encountered before. Imagine's **M.O.V.I.E.** was a big hit in '86, then two years later Serbian maestros Dusko Dimitrejevic and Dragoljub Andjelkovic followed it up with Phantom Club. Oh and they also had help from the probably non-Serbian Simon Butler, who spends his time as a Crash DJ these days rather oddly. "Let's rock!"

It's surprising that the **Phantom Club** hasn't been made into a movie itself yet like all those other ones, since they're a kind of Avengers or X-Men type affair. A group of superheroes with superpowers, their leader Zarg (*classic bad guy name*) has turned them all onto the path of evil. It's your job as Plutus the Zelator, the lowest rank in the team, possibly a janitor, to fight your way through the 500 (**faint**) rooms at Phantom Club HQ, neutralising enemies and completing missions to increase your own rank, then overthrow the Z Man.

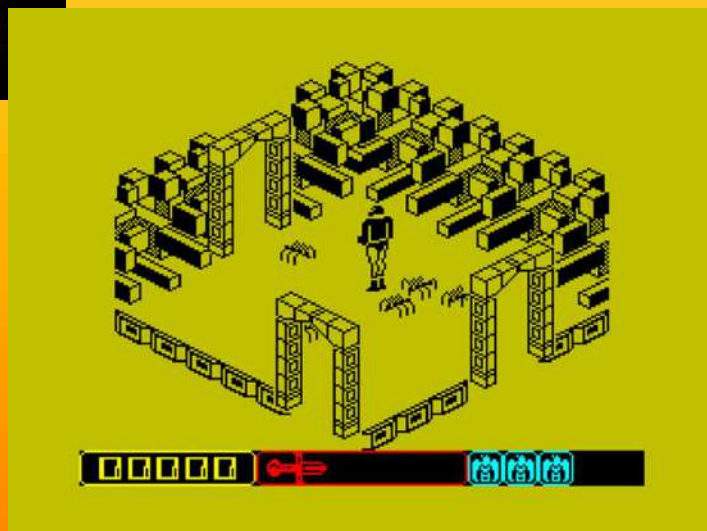
This is relatively good fun for an isometric game. It moves pretty well, not too much of that horrific slowdown just about every game like this is prone to. And your hero chap is indeed quite super, as he can fire mind bullets (*like Tenacious D*) and even do a forward somersault. It's a little difficult to line up the baddies though, the 3D not really helping with this. Some of them annoyingly turn into spiders from **Nosferatu The Vampyre** when you shoot them rather than just sodding off. And I in my rubbishness never found any missions as such, only a TV with a running horse on it. How odd.

But despite its inherent difficulties, Phantom Club is quite a decent 3D trawl. The graphics are very impressive, with some truly abstract wall designs and nice sprites aplenty. Colour is used very psychedelically, with just about every colour on the Speccy used as foreground and background (*white on magenta anybody?*) This is the kind of novel approach which raises the game above the majority of **Sabre Man's** relatives.



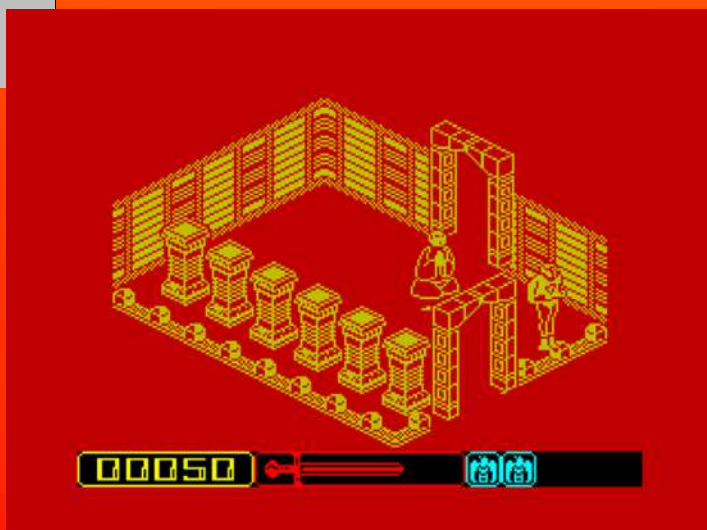
A marvellous SCREEN\$ from Mr. Butler here

Plutus is worried one of these is going to climb up into his short shorts



Once shot, these guys turn into turrets. Cheese it, Plutus!

This monk preaches only zappy violence, not very Buddhist



If we talk about a pantheon of Spectrum programmers, who would we see there, dressed in togas and holding scrolls (*of hex code*)? Maybe the likes of Turner, Cecco, Singleton, Crow, Priestley, the mysterious Stampers in hoods, possibly that Soft And Cuddly guy... But here's one that might not immediately spring to mind - **Costa Panayi**. He was both prolific and impressive throughout the '80s, starting on ZX81 games, then moving to the Speccy with *Androids 1 and 2*, *T.L.L.* and *Cyclone*, then he went 3D mad with the classic *Highway Encounter* and many more, including the not-3D *Deflektor*. *H.A.T.E.* was his swansong in '89, so did he go out on a high note or a dud?

Hostile Alien Terrain Encounter is the slightly boring expansion of the acronym, Costa clearly liking his *Encounters*. So what year is it this time around? It's 2320 actually and guess what - the aliens are still attacking us, the fiends! You need to meet them head-on and on your tod as usual, so you must leave right this minute... for *Stripworld*! Hang on, what kind of game is this...

Calm down, there's no nudity unless you count the blobular aliens (*urgh*). You jump in your star fighter and fly along a bumpy course, avoiding zig-zagging aliens and picking up plasma cells, which line up neatly behind you in a nice nod to *Highway Encounters* of the past. Finish the level and the next one sees you swap for a Ground Assault Vehicle named *Gav*. A tank to you and me. The tank can't fly as such but it sure can shoot at stuff. The more plasma cells you collect, the more lives you get on the next level, which is novel. And there's a smart bomb which destroys every M.F. in the room. No wait, that's the **C64** version only, what a crock! Come on Costa, you're better than this. There are 30 levels, of which I made it to about 5 or 6. I don't claim to be any good at these games, y'know.

Mr. Panayi sure was a wiz at the old diagonal 3D graphics and scrolling - U.S. Gold really should have got him to do the *Zaxxon* convo if they had any sense. This game is monochrome but still looks an absolute treat. Your ship moves and shoots so smoothly, it's like playing an isometric shmup, which ain't easy to make on the Spec. There's a great **Ben Dalglish** tune, on the title screen only but never mind, though the in-game sound is rather limited. *H.A.T.E.* is fun to play for a while, but maybe a tad one-dimensional (*ironically*) in the long term. Still, a decent send-off for one of the ZX Greats. Sounds like a book **Graeme Mason's** now thinking of making - you can have that one Graeme if you're reading ;)

THE ISO-METRICS

PHANTOM CLUB

82%

H.A.T.E.

84%





*Argh, ok so you H.A.T.E. the website,
please don't shoot me...*

*How cute is your ship? Shoot the
spheres to turn them into plasma
cells*



*Level 3 is green and we're doing well
for plasma cells at the mo*

*'Tanks' to some sick skills, I've made
it to level 4. Boom!*





"Woohoo, Spring break!" No idea why I've said that

Amazon delivery drones are DEFINITELY a bad idea



Soon terrible stories of fire & death began to reach the tribe.



Personally I can't see why he'd ever leave his home village

*Alas poor Yorick. And Yorick. And Yorick.
And Yorick*



NEADEITAL

(Heavy Spectrum, 2020)

How do you say this then? My guess is *Nay-a-day-tal* but it's not the most obvious name for a game. Like erm, Kobyashi Ag'Kwo, which does exist. I took to the internet for pronunciation reassurance, only to find that **Matt Birch** and the Heavy S. massive have made it up! Well at least that means I can say it however I like, I can pronounce it *Moustachioed Archipelago* if I so desire.

So *Noodletowel* is kinda a homage to those **Gargoyle** classics of old Tir Na Nog, Dun Darach, Marsport and Ad Astra. If those games had an engine, this might well use it. Probably that Unreal one, everything uses that. Still that's okay - at least this is a really welcome change of pace from AGD platformer of the week number 27. Right, have to get out of '*Grumpy For No Reason*' mode now...

Ne'erDoWellTom is the name given to the world that existed before humans loused it up. There were giant folk called the **Nephilim**, and they had **Fields** to die for. They had to protect Earth from aliens but were struggling, so had to get help from the primitives. Not the '80s group who sang '*Crash*' though (*tune dat*). I've read the plot para in the inlay several times and I still don't really get it, but no matter.

You play not Cucchulain but **Lelak**, one of his brothers from another mother. You must wander around, find and combine objects, visit the apothecary (*oh sorry, that's Dun Darach*) and generally use your primitive mind to save the world and make your day more interesting. My own primitive mind managed to solve a few puzzles... at length.



Put stick, grass and bone on the little tables and a fishing rod appears. Now that's magic!

Brr, it's a bit nippy in the Naek Ravines. Lelak should watch out for shrinkage



Ow! Drone is angry and rains down blocky cyan hell

*This naked lady occasionally grants you spells.
Thanks, naked lady!*



There's a great help feature in *Needle Tarn*, which you'll certainly make frequent use of. Simply go to your tent, fall asleep and your dreams give you a clue as to what to do next. If only real life was like that instead of the usual boring, confused dreams we tend to be stuck with. Usually just the stuff you have to do in real life, only doing it naked. Thanks.

There are several characters you can interact with around your home village and beyond. And the great thing is they're nearly all very concise and to the point, no waffling here. Like the opposite of *Disco Elysium*, which has been driving me mad on PS5 (*wot dat?*) lately. And it promises to throw up some very different problems, like dealing with a destructive drone. Which I was quite surprised to see, in prehistoric times and all.

This game looks brilliant, a more modern take on those classic *Gargoyle Games* with very nice, smooth graphics and more colour than one would expect. Sound is fairly sparse which is a slight shame, with a tune on the menu screen only. A brief introduction kicks things off nicely too.

So it's a big *Hats Off* to *Heavy Spectrum*, maaaaaaan. It's great to see such a major effort invested in a modern Speccy game, as anyone doing it nowadays is surely doing it purely for the fun of it, despite this title costing me a fiver. It's definitely a modern classic, and I'd probably invest even more time in it if I didn't insist on spending my days doing these little write-ups. Still, maybe when I retire...

THE VERDICT

93%



IT'S ONLY ROCK 'N' ROLL (K-Tel, 1983) &

THE BIZ (Virgin Games, 1984)

K-Tel were big noises in the music scene back in the olden days (remember your parents' groovy record collection?) and they gave the computing scene a whirl in '83. They had the moderately novel idea of putting two games on each tape to convey the impression of value for money. But at £7 a pop you'd expect two okay games for your buck. *I.O.R.N.R.* is easily the most interesting proposition among their catalogue, so let's see if "I like it". That's a joke, it was a song by... et...

Interestingly it's written by *Kevin Smith*, not of *Clerks* fame but of *The Wild Bunch* fame, so hopes are high that it's not tat, and that those *Pinkerton* agents aren't out for your ass. First name your group and choose difficulty level 1-3 (hint: 1 is impossible helpfully). Then you get a colourful status report, including band popularity, energy, happiness (refreshingly) and status symbols owned! Next you write a song, which brilliantly you see on the screen, not that it ever changes a great deal and usually involves picking spots and throwing up - clearly a strong punk influence at play. You can hire a manager - I recommend *Donny Damned* as he only asks for 9% but is proportionately useless.

Then get a gig, which usually starts off as busking for a month, and mostly getting arrested. After a bit you get the option of pubs and clubs, and (again brilliantly) you see a little graphic sequence of your performance! It's totally pointless and hardly ever changes, but still, what an interesting feature. Like the *Football Manager* highlights, but without the agonising tension. Occasionally the police do a drug raid during your gig, but otherwise it pays the bills. Oddly you have to decide how much energy to put into your performance. Maybe you do better if you adopt a cool, complacent attitude and don't really bother, as I didn't do so well giving it my all.

If you earn at least £22k (I didn't) you can go on a money-spinning tour, worldwide if you're even more flush. And the all-important status symbols will cost you £56k for a *Rolls-Royce* to drive into a swimming pool, £153k for a French villa to wreck and £180k for a private jet for those mile-high drug orgies. My level was more mundane - losing popularity when you do a pub gig because it's the locals' darts night, and starting up a fan club just like folks did in the '80s, promising free T-shirts and maybe even a badge.

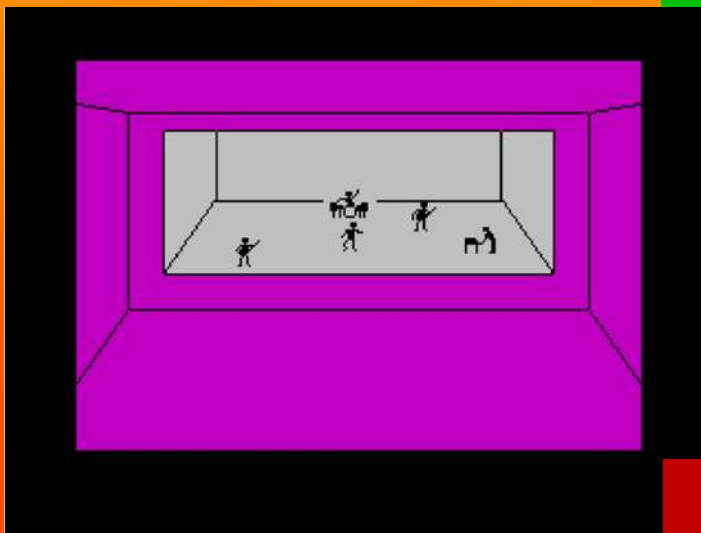
So things are in place for quite a promising experience in this game, but unless I've completely misunderstood, there seems to be a bug in the game which means you get declared bankrupt fairly randomly, even if you seem to be doing tolerably well financially at the time. This is a shame as I quite enjoy it, as far as it goes, but the threat of impending insta-death has put me off carrying on with it. Maybe the *Pinkertons* do catch up with you after all. See if you can beat my high score of 14, out of what I have no idea.



*This must be what the ancients used to call... a
C.D. ...?*

*In 9 months you've racked up a hefty bank loan,
started a fan club and saved a lot of energy*

STATUS REPORT	
TIME ELAPSED	= 9 mon.
HAPPINESS	= 36
ENERGY	= 520
STAT/SYMBOLS	= 0
MANAGER	= Damned
POPULARITY	= 37
FAN CLUBS	= 1
MONEY	= 2034
ROYALTY RATE	= 0 pence
BANK LOAN	= 6252
INTEREST DUE	= 312
PRESS ANY KEY	



*The Stick Man Band gamely do their thang
despite the lack of audience*

*This is the best possible song according to that
score. And... it's not bad actually*

Love is like a dirty joke
Do they look into my eyes
So get me to a doctor
Beam me up Clive

Love is like killing
Shall I sing a song
So get me to a doctor
Lay it on me

Kissing is like killing
Dont you sing a song
You need to make it grow
Put your trust in me

SONG RATING =10 OUT OF 10

DO YOU ACCEPT SONG? (y/n)

Like K&Jel, **Virgin** knew a thing or two about the music scene in days of yore. I used to love going round their Megastores back in the '80s and '90s, before the internet (or was it **Metallica**?) killed them off tragically. Most of Virgin's earlier Speccy games were not much better than K&Jel's efforts in fairness, so this title would probably be either average or middling at best surely?

Would you credit it, it was written by a certain **Chris Sievey**, who seems to have a musical connection of some sort, and on checking this, it was found that he was none other than... drum roll... **Frank Sidebottom**! The big-headed Northern keyboard playing comedian chap. Well I never. I also never was really much of a fan, but I'm impressed that a cult celeb like him could program on the Spectrum. It also raises hopes for an amusing experience ahead.

You get asked a lot of questions at the start. Band name, mates' names, music genre, home town, marital status, inside leg, cholesterol etc. Then you get given the usual paltry pocket money to start out with. The significant factors in this game include band tightness, stage presence, visual impact, song quality (does this really come into it?), fan following and ambition. So your options are to record a song, so long as the studio isn't all booked up by **Sigue Sigue Sputnik**, hiring a manager (a necessary evil), sending a tape off to a record company for a meagre tennet, promoting your stuff, pressing the appropriate number of singles and albums, making a cheesy video and then starting the week's rockin' once all the above are in place.

Then wait as the gig offers flood in, which they do, although some venues seem reluctant to offer you any dosh at all, in which case a day off spent rehearsing might be the wiser option. According to your manager, you permanently need to rehearse, which gets annoying even if it is the truth. What makes the game fun is the variety of 'Community Chest' type occurrences that happen along the way. Such as sacking a hopeless band member, buying a dry ice machine, insuring your van/getting your stuff nicked, appearing on *ITV* rockumentaries (if you will), your dad winning the lottery but only giving you a tennet out of it, or perhaps my favourite - having a band outing to the hair salon! Ouch, expensive back in the '80s.

It takes a little while to get things moving but happily the game does grant you enough time to find your feet, so long as you don't go completely **Keith Moon**. I thought I was getting somewhere when my single "Sheeeeeeet" suddenly appeared in the 'hit parade', but was then disappointed when it only reached number 125 despite me spending a pretty penny on a vid in an exotic location (Pinewood). I was informed "Your single has stiffed!" and was left with hundreds of unsold copies ready for the bonfire. Well that's Rawk 'n' Rawl, baby... you gotta love it.

TOP OF THE POPS?

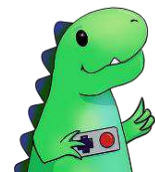


IT'S ONLY ROCK 'N' ROLL

72%

THE BIZ

83%





*In the year of our Lord 1984 A.D. Rock 'N'
Roll was born. Can I get an AMEN?*

*Al 'n' the Als have a manager and a dry ice
machine, so they're good to go darksynthing*

```

"THE BIZ" STATUS IN WEEK 5 1984
ARTIST = Al n TheAls
FROM THE SLUM'S OF LIVERPOOL
RECORD LABEL =
CURRENT SINGLE =
MUSICAL DIRECTION = DARKSYNTH
RECORDS IN STOCK = 0
THIS WEEKS SALES = 0
TOTAL SALES..... = 0
WEEKS IN CHART.. = 0
HIGHEST POSITION = 0
                                     *MANAGER*
                                     @£24&11%

BAND TIGHTNESS = 7 %
STAGE PRESENCE = 1 %
VISUAL IMPACT = 3 %
SONG QUALITY = 5 %
FAN FOLLOWING = 3 %
DRIVE/AMBITION = 100 %
OVERALL 'STAR' RATING = 7 %
WEEKLY TAKINGS = £ 79
MONEY IN THE BANK = £ 459
PRESS 'X' TO CONTINUE 'THE BIZ'
  
```

HELLO, I'M DODGY EVE

I CAN MANAGE YOU TO THE TOP FOR
11 % OF YOUR EARNINGS PLUS
A WEEKLY WAGE OF £ 24
I'LL GET YOU BETTER GIGS, SEEK
RADIO AND TV WORK, NEGOTIATE
CONTRACTS AND GIVE YOU ADVICE IF
YOU PHONE ME

DO WE SIGN A 12 MONTH DEAL ?

*Sounds legit. And it's literally the only offer
you have on the table*

*The Sisters of Mercy carefully weigh up this
life-changing decision*

DO YOU WANT TO BUY A DRY ICE
MACHINE FOR £100 TO
IMPROVE YOUR VISUAL IMPACT ?

```

TUE
WED
THR THE SCOUT HALL
FRI
SAT * REHEARSING. Cost £10
SUN * REHEARSING. Cost £16
MON THE DUCK & ANT-EATER
PRESS 'Y' for YES, 'N' for NO or
'R' TO REHEARSE AND WRITE SONGS.
  
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A cracking picture this. I think Simon Butler would rate it

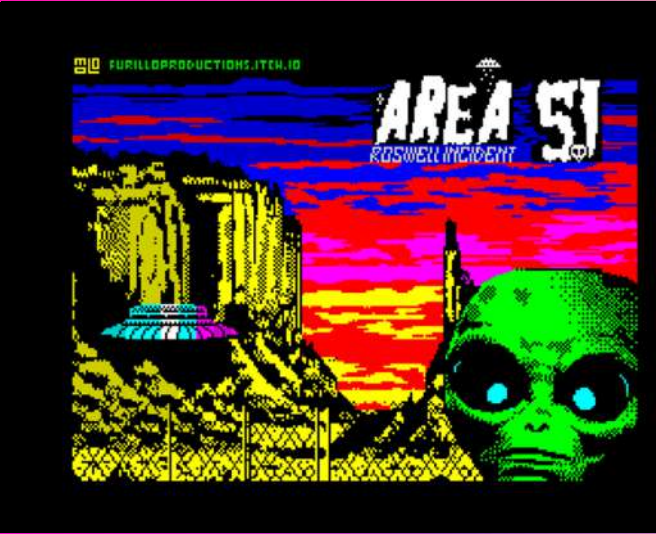
Now come on, don't beat around the bush. Am I dead or not?



Excruciating pain seizes your body. The creature feeds on your essence. Your screams are drowned by its insatiable appetite, your existence reduced to mere sustenance for this abomination.

As your life force fades away, you become a mere memory. Your fate is sealed...

~~~~~  
[The end. Press space to restart]



*Argh, photobombing Mekon! Where was Dan Dare when Mars went and Attacked?*

*In your hotel you meet Diana munching on her rat-atouille*



A mysterious woman in a crimson dress sips her whiskey, her eyes veiled by large dark glasses that hint at a hidden agenda.

She possesses an allure beyond the ordinary. Her presence captivates those daring enough to meet her gaze.

~~~~~  
[H] Head out for a drive on the road.
[R] Return to your motel room.

THE BIG, SHINY INTERACTIVE

FICTION CATCH-UP!

THE DARK VEIL (Furillo Productions, 2023)

Interactive Fiction is an odd little genre. It's bit like how there are plenty of indie titles these days in the modern gaming world - a bit of a change of pace and something a little different from the norm. There's a place for all these things and the more Speccy games we get these days the better! They tend to be short stories with multiple choice elements courtesy of the **MuCho** system, lots of different ways to die and if you're really lucky, some cracking digitised piccies.

Furillo like doing them, that's for sure, and first off in our catch-up is **The Dark Veil**, a dramatic looking affair which pretty much amounts to escaping from a big spooky house which you've unwisely wandered into. There's some nice descriptive text here which adds well to the spooky ambience and also some decent pictures, though they mostly appear when you've just suffered a grisly death. Oops.

It does tend to get fairly obvious what sort of things might end up killing you. Usually relatively reckless things, but occasionally fairly innocuous activities like looking down a well. Ah, maybe I should have known better... As such it usually takes a few goes to complete, after you've perfected your trial and error technique. Quite fun, this one, if rather standard adventuring fare.

AREA 51: THE ROSWELL INCIDENT (Furillo Productions, 2023)

Next up is another escapee from the Furillo Asylum, **Area 51: The Roswell Incident**. I love me a bit of pulpy sci-fi action, so this looks good to me. As a down-at-heels gumshoe you receive a job offer that's very likely to be the death of you - investigating Area 51. Should be straightforward, can't see that presenting a long-lasting problem. You approach, you get shot, you die.



Billie looks badass, while Jacko desperately wants to answer teacher's question

Jacko saying "Come on mate" literally made me laugh my bottom off

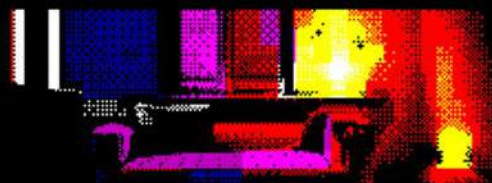


♥ MICHAEL:
Come on mate, let's go dancing at DanceClub or have dinner at PizzaPop?



Wonder who's Head and who's Heels in this relationship

Lovely colours here. Furillo are breaking the fourth wall once more



Finally, it's getting dark. It's Saturday, and you're, by some twist of fate, all alone this weekend, preparing for your YouTube livestream. Today, you're interviewing none other than Furillo Productions... what a couple of troublemakers! Everything is perfect, well, almost. You're missing something important, a drink, and then you can start the livestream...

● Nah, you do the livestream without anything to drink. Check the fridge...

I like this one. It's quirky, silly and there are plenty of nods to '80s and '90s sci-fi staples, such as playing the **E.T.** or **X-Files** theme tunes now and then. Or chatting to a lady who looks awfully like the nefarious rat-guzzling Diana from **V**. There seems to be a lot more to this game as well, more locations and more variety of actions. More like this please, o fine fellows of Furillo!

BILLIE NIGHT *(Sequentia Soft, 2023)*

A couple of quickies to finish off with now, and "ow!" **Sequentia Soft** have made a weird homage to the late king of pop, Mikay Jacksay, called **Billie Night**. "Heehee!" You play Jacko's girl, *"It's after midnight"* and you're just coming out of the cinema with him when zombies attack! You have to somehow survive (*so you can eventually have the kid who is not his son*) which does actually seem rather hard. I couldn't finish it incredibly, in a new low for my adventuring prowess, but it certainly raised a few laughs in an odd sort of way.

JAVI VS. PARRISH *(Furillo Productions, 2023)*

Finally those guys again **Furillo** offer us **Javi vs. Parrish**, which seems to be an in-joke turned into a quasi adventure. As Javi you have to get your livestream going (*I'm too old to know the details, but it seems to be important in some way*) but not get so pissed as to be incoherent or get waylaid by the evil-ish Parr-ish. I guess this is how these guys live and you too can share in it! It's short, it's silly, it's not un-fun.

I'm not going to give these titles percentage scores as they're really not your regular kind of gamery and they're not even regular adventures per se. It's mostly the graphics that attract me, as they tend to be very impressive, but there's often some good writing behind them too. I think that if the **MuCho** system could be used to even greater effect with a broader game and even more choices available, the result could be quite an epic. In the meantime, keep pushing those boundaries guys, it's more fun than many an AGD platformer.

OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART I



INSERT COIN

MOON CRESTA

(Incentive, May 1985)

This early arcade licence came out of the blue for most. Incentive didn't do like most companies of

the time and produce Space Invaders, Galaxian and Frogger clones. Rather they specialised in mountaineering adventures and maze games starring a capital X. So when Ian Andrew acquired the arcade hit Moon Cresta rights for a grand, things were about to go intergalactic for them.

PRESS START

Ship splitting into 3 is novel, if bizarre

Multi-colour glowy stars make for a pretty setting for destruction

Bonus stages, in this case docking, are always welcome for variety

Good noisy sound FX are arcade-like

An impressive game for its age. You go, old timer!

1'ST 000400 HI 025000 2'ND 000000
MOONCRESTA



1'ST 010420 HI025000 2'ND 000000
MOONCRESTA

--- MISSION AIM ---

DOCKING OF ROCKETS

USING LEFT,RIGHT AND FIRE



GAME OVER

The alien patterns are quite repetitive

There are no other backgrounds, just the twinkly night sky

Only 3 lives - standard, but annoying

The aliens group together and laugh at you when you die - rude!

No cameo appearance by Zippy from Splat...

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 90% Smash

YS - 5/10 Hit Hit Miss

SU - 3*

Sinclair Programs - 38%
(idiots)

Your Computer - 3/5

ZX Computing - 5/5

S.C. user score - 72%

* OVERALL 66% *

1'ST 005740 HI025000 2'ND 000000
MOONCRESTA



1'ST 009940 HI025000 2'ND 000000
MOONCRESTA



A Dinosaur's Opinion

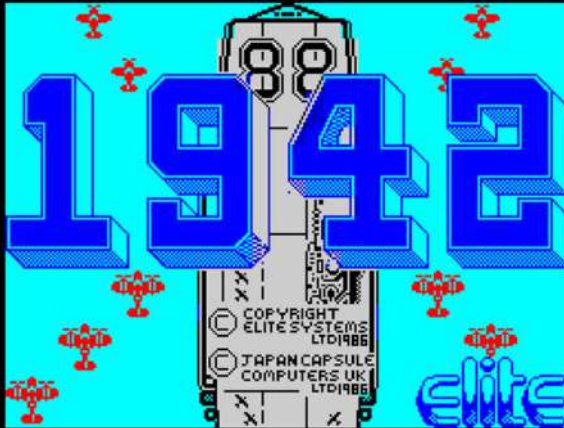
Arcade Styling - 85%

Playability - 76%

Unique Features - 81%

* OVERALL 81% *

OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART I



INSERT COIN

1942

(Elite, October
1986)

Elite liked a licence, in fact most things they did involved one, the... licence tarts! This was

another arcade convo, which unusually dispensed with the predictable spacey scenario and substituted a WWII setting instead. People didn't seem to rate the arcade original much, so wonder if this game will sink like the Bismark in this little competition. If the Bismark was a plane...

PRESS START

5 lives - some generosity in a shmup at last!

Lovely clear background, uncluttered by excessive detail

A blue screen, not black for a change. This is very welcome

Good checkpoints, not setting you too far back at any time

Nice plane flipping and take-off animations





GAME OVER

Sparse sound FX, really need a bit more

Big planes taking you from behind can cause distress

Graphics are good, but a little small and on the functional side

No extra life for completing Level 1. Beyond that, who knows? Not me

No sonic rendition of "War... what is it good for?"

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 63%

YS - 8/10

SU - 5*

Ace - 4/5

S.C. user score - 69%

* OVERALL 76% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 72%

Playability - 85%

Unique Features - 73%

* OVERALL 77% *

OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART I



INSERT COIN

LIGHT FORCE

(F.T.L., November
1986)

As unlikely as Incentive doing an arcade shoot-em-up was Gargoyle doing one, albeit disguised as

Faster Than Light. The masters of the graphic adventure threw Cucchulain into a spaceship to give him a change of scenery, since the Marsport follow-ups were nowhere to be seen. And they ended up with a smash hit, even winning awards for the game's music when there wasn't any in it. That takes skill.

PRESS START

Excellent colourful graphics
with no clash at all

Colourful planet backgrounds
as well from Level 2 onwards

Occasional bonus life
opportunities come up
throughout the game

Decent checkpoint placement
prevents too much frustration

Novel mix of enemies to shoot
and ones you just have to
avoid





GAME OVER

That annoying meteor that
slams down the middle of the
screen, marmalising you!

A slightly shonky looking
spaceship design if we're
being honest

No music despite being award-
nominated for same

Underwhelming loading screen

The phrase "*Light Force is
for vengeance*" never really
caught on...

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 91% Smash

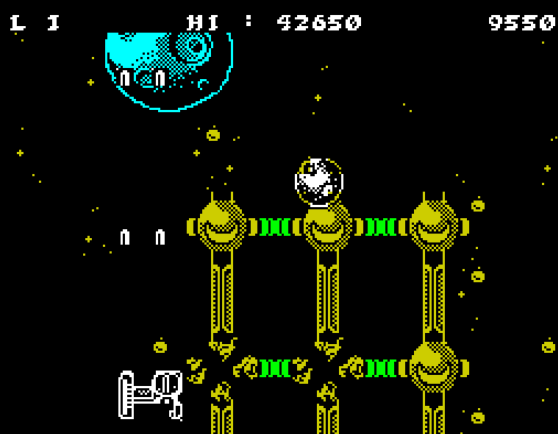
YS - 7/10

SU - 5* Classic

Your Computer - 4/5

S.C. user score - 79%

* OVERALL 82% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 90%

Playability - 88%

Unique Features - 75%

* OVERALL 84% *

OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART I



INSERT COIN

NEMESIS

(Konami, May 1987)

Konami were Kings of the Arcade probably, even if their brief foray into releasing Spectrum software themselves ended

embarrassingly quickly. Speccy fans were promised a surprisingly colourful version of Nemesis, which got toned down somewhat on release when reality set in.

PRESS START

Ingenious and easy to use
weapon selection system

Use of more than one weapon
at a time is a pleasant
surprise

Moves at a fair click

Has quite a good loading
screen

Has the same name as the
uber-cool Warlock





GAME OVER

The annoying repetitive bit at the start, there to give you weapons presumably

Punishing checkpoints make everything far too repetitive

Rather dull sound FX, not much of an arcade feel

A meagre 3 lives is nowhere near enough for this game

No guest appearance from the uber-cool Warlock

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 59%

YS - 8/10

SU - 5* Classic

S.C. user score - 57%

* OVERALL 72% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 70%

Playability - 65%

Unique Features - 77%

* OVERALL 71% *

OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART I



INSERT COIN

ZYNAPS

(Hewson, July 1987)

Another non-licence now, like Light Force, as Hewson tried their hand at a sideways scroller, the dependable Dominic

Robinson of Uridium fame at the helm. Other luminaries such as Steve Turner and Stephen Crow were also in the room at the same time, so the pressure was on for something good. Reminds me of the Bandersnatch ad with the Imagine crew standing around laughing nervously, increasingly aware that they might well soon be unemployed.

PRESS START

Super sprites, clear as crystal

Massively colourful, and nice and neat with it

Decent sound FX - not too repetitive and varied enough

Very playable from the off, nothing too nasty in the first minute or so

Room to breathe, enemy attacks not too constant





GAME OVER

Hard to grasp weapons system
- I still can't get my head
round it

Aliens' loopy patterns look
great but can be quite
annoying

The checkpoints are perhaps
not the kindest

Menu screen not intuitive

I'm not a huge fan of Steve
Turner's music. I know, I'm
sorry...

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 91% Smash

YS - 8/10

SU - 10/10 Classic

S.C. user score - 82%

* OVERALL 87% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 92%

Playability - 90%

Unique Features - 83%

* OVERALL 88% *

ROCKSTAR ATE MY HAMSTER plus mods

(Code Masters, 1989)

Some years after The Biz and It's Only Rock 'N' Roll, the **Codies** had a go at reproducing the drugs, sweat and beers of the music scene, with the emphasis firmly on silliness. Borrowing the infamous **Freddie Starr** headline and having the not as yet infamous **Russell Brand** (*not really*) chewing on a hamster leg and giving the finger on the loading screen sets the tone admirably. The game price? £9.99 or £12.99 on disk. Wait, what? I thought these guys were kings of the budget world? Sheesh...

Once you've picked yourself up off the floor and paid those excessive readies, you can start playing. You make the decisions for the hapless pair **Cecil** and **Clive**, who have flunked out of theatrical management and want to try their luck in the pop world instead. They make an amusing comedy act, Clive in particular hilarious in his unerring enthusiasm for, and ineptitude at, everything. There's an impressive 50 musicians to choose from in the original game, all with silly names and ace profile pictures. You can have 4 of them if you like. I created an inevitably short-lived supergroup with Tina Turnoff, Lemme, Dorrissey and the mysterious Bimbo Baggins. Their wage demands did for me within 2 weeks. Best to stick to one generally.

Once you've sorted out some probably stolen equipment, you have a few options. 'Practice' is important (*probably*) but sadly we don't witness the actual process, just Cecil and Clive yawning throughout. 'Publicity' stunts can be arranged by Clive, occasionally resulting in the literal death of your star, but more often going nowhere much. You can also pamper them with 'Gifts' to inflate those egos even more.

But the meat of the game lies in the 'Gig' and 'Release' choices. Gigging is a surefire way to rake in the readies, especially if you can sell out a stadium, even if the tickets only cost a fiver. While releasing a single and album can help too, particularly if accompanied by an expensive cheesy video. **Steven Cheeseburger** charges a cool £3m to direct, Clive a mere fiver! Clive helpfully suggests track titles very much at random while Cecil always, but always, accidentally wipes off one of the tracks by pressing the wrong button on the deck, the great buffoon.

Then there's the 'Community Chest' random elements. A record company may sign you up if you're lucky. A charity gig for such as The Prince's Truss might be offered, but it could also be



I only recently spotted the hamster leg in Russell's mouth. Duh

Whatcha gonna do eh, Robert Maxwell? Bet it involved stealing people's pensions (satire)



I can't believe this supergroup flopped. I'd DEFINITELY go see them!

Sadly you can't see much of these conjoined Salt 'N' Pepa lookalikes here, one of many ace caricatures



a scam. A foreign company might pirate your records, and you can rough them up or buy them out. Which I did and it cost me an eye-watering £400k, little did I suspect. Gulp.

The great joy of this game is playing it for the first time, as the various elements are really well done and it's very graphically appealing and humorous. Trouble is, it seems proper tricky to get anywhere in the biz. I recruited happy-go-lucky **Dorrissey** as a solo artist, and was briefly excited to see his single scrape into the top ten. I spent a fortune promoting it, sending him to the Caribbean for the vid, but it just slumped, as did his album. I made a fair penny even so until he met an untimely end through one of Clive's stoopid stunts...

So it's not easy to succeed and the other disappointment is the lack of variety. The occasional unusual thing will happen, but when it doesn't things get highly repetitive. It's like the programmers got off to a great start, full of enthusiasm on a sugar rush, but then ran out of gas halfway through. But wait! There have been other versions of the game since - let's see if they can up the ante a bit.

Probably as one of Clive's naff publicity stunts, the Codies teamed up with loathsome rag The Sun to produce a subtly different version of the game, called **Rock Star Goes Bizarre**, as a competition prize. It's got a modified front screen and boasts even more spurious stars. Namely Jason Donner-Kebab, Coily Mynose (*that's Kylie... I think*) and By George. But also non-musicians Piers Organ (*ptui*), The Queer Mum (*oh lordy*), Furry (*Fergie*) and John-Paul Ringo II, aka The Pope. Ooh the temerity! Apart from this 'bizarre' new blood, the game remains the same.

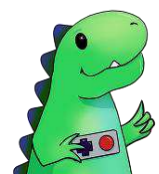
But in 2021 Italians **FIRE** released another mod of the game, this time with another 50 more recent artists on it. Trouble is, most of them I'm too old and doddery to recognise. Erm, there's Brandy Cellar (*Amy Winehouse of course, great pic too*), Adeel with a comically chubby face, Redd Copycat (*Ed Sheeran I believe*), Waka Shaka (*Shakira?*) and best of all, surely the only proper rock star amongst them all, the late great **Keef Lint**! The rest I've no idea, sorry, just old.

So while the mods are good fun, and the pen pictures really are impressive, what this game really needs instead for an add-on is a whole load of new random events that can happen. An injection of variety would really boost the game as a whole and give it new life. I know I ask an awful lot, but never mind. As it is, this is still one of the Speccy's funnier moments, and great for a bit of a laff from time to time. To finish with a typical Cecil quote - "*Drop dead, Clive*".

THE SCORE ACCORDING TO GALLUP

ROCKSTAR ATE MY HAMSTER

82%





Oh Morrissey, what have you gone and said this time?

The subtly different Sun-tastic version of the game



Haha, someone's going to Hell!



The great Firestarter himself is right at home in this game





Alex is looking pretty fancy here. Trident and pistol is an odd combo but hey

Sticks were compulsory in those days unless you were a funny-looking dog



AMONG THEM THERE WAS A GIRL
NAMED JANE. SOON SHE GAVE BIRTH
TO A SON, ALEXANDER

MONSTER APPROACHING!



This guy needs a few stabs with your Pride trident. Prident?

Nice little screen between levels. Let's rock down to Death Avenue

LEVEL 02 - DEATH AVENUE



THE DARK

plus Redux & Lost Pages

(Oleg Origin, 1997)

10th December 1993. A date when gaming changed forever. Nothing to do with the demise of the Spectrum though. It was the release date of a game called **Doom**, a revolution in gory first player shooting. What's that? **Wolfenstein 3D** came out on 5th May 1992? Ah well, that was good too. Note to self: rewrite intro some time.

And lo, PC gamers played it and saw that it was good blocky bloodthirsty fun. There's no way by now that the prehistoric Speccy could do this sort of thing, people scoffed. Or those who vaguely remembered it did at least. But a mere 4 years later the mighty **Oleg Origin** said "*Hold my vodka*" and offered the world the ground-breaking **The Dark**. It's funny, probably no-one much cared back then, but once it was officially certified as 'retro' it gained much more interest.

This wasn't even just an '*impressive for 2 minutes but then the end*' demo either, it was a full playable game. Even more amazingly, you could play it on your ancient 48K machine, if you were a bit odd and hadn't swapped it for a 128 by then. Rumour has it that **Zosya** are currently working on versions for the unexpanded 1K ZX81, so that should be nice. I bet they could make even that sing.

What's the story of The Dark then? Let's watch the intro, kids. Cue impressive graphics and some rather slow creepy speech. The Land Of Winds was a peaceful place, if a bit windy, when eeeeeevil forces invaded it and slaughtered most of the townsfolk. Some fled including Jane, who soon begat **Alexander**. That's you! You have sworn to go back and give the bad gits merry hell. In the dark presumably.

There are 9 long levels of monster mayhem to negotiate. Usually your exit requires finding a couple of tokens and at least one key. They're fiendishly designed with extra health, armour and ammo dotted around, and lots of enemies trying to bite you. Your pointy stick



Pleasingly large pieces of gore fly past your shoulders regularly

It's Monster Rush Hour, better grab that box of ammo sharpish!



No gun found yet in Lost Pages. Alex has to rely on his over-compensatory trident

You can pi\$\$ ghoulies off nicely when you wield a mighty white cross



is a bit hard going but once you find a gun, you're ready to rock like **Duke Nukem!** Most enemies take a couple of hits but steer clear of red-hooded reaper dudes - they're immortal, man and mucho hurtioso.

It's well documented just how impressive this game is, so I won't repeat too much obvious stuff. Suffice it to say it's bordering on satanic how Mr. Origin got most of a Doom type game to run, fast as well, on a 48K Spectrum. The graphics are awesome and with plenty of colour. The gameplay is compelling, with the map option an excellent feature, and the variety in the levels is admirable. The sound is relatively minimal, but hey, something had to give in the whole process.

Time passed... Then, a staggering 24 years later, Zosya released a **Redux** of the game. Who invented that strange term, I wonder? It does sound cool though. A new load screen, a less sinister intro (*no speech*) and improved status bar graphics were the main draw. Oh, and a bonus game with the physical release! **The Dark: Lost Pages** is a prequel to the main game, which sees a young 2D Alex trying to find 9 maps. Once found, the game goes 3D again for more familiar The Dark territory. Trouble is, you really need a map for the 2D bit as it's extremely difficult without one. Shame really, it looks the part and sounds great. It's just too hard for this reviewer.

But in conclusion it's impossible to deny that **The Dark** and its offspring constitute a major landmark in Spectral history. The practically impossible has been attempted and largely achieved, it's a remarkable piece of programming. Just to be awkward, what I would really love to see is a 128K version with all bells and whistles, all games combined in one load with even more amazing features. Go on Zosya, I'd totally buy it, I promise.

THE DARK RECKONING

95%



GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS (U.S. Gold, 1989) &

BEYOND THE ICE PALACE (Elite, 1988)

In 1986 **Elite** did a conversion of Capcom coin-op **Ghosts 'N' Goblins** which proved to be a 'graveyard smash', but by '89 they had given up the Spectrum game, so it was up to those coin-op connivers **U.S. Gold** to produce its sequel. The goblins had been given the elbow due to creating an unpleasant working environment, but the ghosts had nowhere to go so they stayed on, to be accompanied by their barely improved new work colleagues, the Ghouls. H.R. had a terrible time trying to keep the peace throughout this turbulent period. This was one of the last Speccy games I bought, and I remember it came in quite a nice cardboard box, which was a bit different from the usual plastic cases. The things you remember eh?

So Good Sir Knight Arthur has had 3 years' peace since he defeated the charming demon who kidnapped his girl, Princess Hus (*a perfectly normal princess name*). But the bad guys have come back and have managed to repeat the trick, so he's got to perform heroics once again. Dude... talk about high maintenance. He has to battle through various environments, again beautifully displayed on the intro screens during the game, and take on the army of the dead with only a rusty tin can costume to protect him. As in the original, it can take a hit, but no more than that. He has a good supply of weapons at least, with more to be found in chests. Although whenever I opened one, a magician appeared and turned me into a duck. Which I don't find funny...

Ghosts 'N' Goblins was a game which was enjoyable for a quick blast, but generally rather too difficult to get far in. I think I saw the 'Ice Palace' level (*of which more later*) once or twice in my lifetime. So maybe they made **Ghouls 'N' Ghosts** a bit easier, so all the family could play along happily? Of course not! It still retains that nasty habit the enemies have of popping up in the most inconvenient places possible – it's almost predictable in its unpredictability, so you have to be on guard at all times, preferably jumping and shooting most of the time. In the olden days I never got anywhere in it, but with the help of my good friend, Sir Save of Scum, I was able after a while to do the first few levels until meeting a big Chinese Dog boss who I couldn't befriend with biscuits.

Despite its habitual wanton user-unfriendliness, **Ghosts' Ghoulies** is a pretty good game. The graphics nicely improve upon the original, the backgrounds offer colourful variety and some good AY tunes and effects add to the fun. I think you'd have to be a pretty darn amazing gamer to be able to play it without getting killed every ten seconds or so, and certainly a lot better than me, but there is at least the saving grace of a 'Continue' option, so the programmers must have felt a pang of guilt over the difficulty level there. But let's face it, practically every Spectrum programmer was evil and didn't want ANYONE to complete their games! The sad thing is I still refuse to watch them get played through on **Youtube**... just in case one day I manage to do it properly myself, which we all know will never happen. Plus my reactions will only get worse with age, although it could be argued that my 'elder's wisdom' might compensate for it. Maybe adventures will suddenly be a cinch. I can dream at least...



"Here comes Halloween, here comes Halloween"

I think this was level 3 or something, I'm just showing off that I got this far



Arthur enjoys a rare platform jumping interlude

This end of level boss is easy to beat once he loses his head



A year earlier, Elite must have been a bit strapped for cash after bidding on so many arcade licences, and decided to create a bit of an unofficial sequel for their hit **Ghosts 'N' Goblins**. Cheeky that, but quite clever. Its title is derived from the second level of the challenging original. They changed the look of the knight from short, stocky and beardy to tall, slim and helmety just to ensure they didn't get too badly sued. And they made sure there were no 'N's in the title - calling it '**Knights 'N' Palaces**' would really have blown them out of the water. In all fairness, there were any number of games around similar to this one, so I reckon they played it just right.

"Beyond the Ice Palace, to the north, left a bit, then third on your right, lies a mystical land of fantasy and magic, of goblins and ghosts (yes it actually says that bit), of good and evil". But as usual the place is in uproar as evil spirits have taken over, harassing the area's lumberjacks and forcing them to hang around in bars. The locals are clueless, so decide to shoot an arrow into the air with a begging note asking for some poor sap to go and help them out, 'cos they can't be arsed doing it themselves. Cut to our oblivious hero, taking a nice peaceful walk in the woods one day. Oh look, there's an arrow in the ground, let's pick it up. Heyyyy, wait a minute! What the goblins is going on here? Why should I have to go and save those suckers? It's not fair, waaaaah! Oh sorry, I was thinking how I'd act if I was in that position.

Okay then, so you stick a pan on your head and grudgingly sally forth. Choose your initial weapon from small dagger, big dagger or spiked ball type thingy. Now this bit is important. I couldn't get off the first section using daggers like... ever..., but once I tried out the spiky ball, it seemed way more effective. Guess this was Elite's way of sorting out the dumb from the dumber. Go down into some caverns, fight green flying creatures, destroy a stubborn pink rock thing, pick up a crystal ball, okay all good. Ah, there's a pretty blue butterfly, how nice! Wait, it's trying to kill me, pursuing me all over the shop. And if you run away, more chase you and flitter you to death. I ran headlong to a vertical platformy bit but couldn't shoo away the flying monstrosities. Then it came to me - stand and fight them like a worthy human instead of running away. True, they take 5 bloomin' hits to kill, but it's the only way to do it. As such, progress becomes a tad painful, but you do get places in the end. Such is the Ice Palace way.

After many a save-scum I managed to get through a few levels, but it's far from easy in true G'N'G fashion. Creatures don't quite appear from under your feet as in those games, but there are many and some can be real pains. An end of level caterpillar didn't prove too hard though for a refreshing change - best to get to 'em before they turn into those hateful flutterbys. Once you get into it, this is a pretty darn good game - I bought this BITD but wasn't nearly patient enough to get far as a petulant teenager. The graphics are wicked, colour and sound both sick and generally it's a very polished product by the **Elitenati**. It's so good the legendary **Tina Turner** wrote a song about it in her post-apocalyptic clobber. *"We don't need another heeeeeero..."*

GHOULISH GRADINGS

GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS **86%**

BEYOND THE ICE PALACE **87%**





"All we wanted was beyoooooond.... the ice palace"

You'll never go into the butterfly house in Chester Zoo again after playing this



Three purple people eaters gonna eat you

Just the five horrible insects after you here then





A lovely family photo here. Shouldn't he be firing a chicken from that arrow?

Here's where you start. The gormless guy and gal from Thieves School wait inside



There are more stray arrows here than in your character in Skyrim after a battle

*Does this guard think he's in Barbarian?
Robin ain't no Maria Whittaker*



LOXLEY (World XXI Soft, 2022) &

HALLOWED KNIGHT (C.J.V.G., 2021)

For those of us who had to endure the godawful half a year or so that **Bryan Adams** was Number 1 with the winpy theme tune to *that* movie, here's a terrible reminder, so thanks **Ariel Ruiz**! This game had better be halfway decent for forcing us to have 'Nam-like flashbacks to that... There's even a stunning flying arrow scene in the intro here, which is pretty damn cool to be fair. And some lovingly recreated digitised pics of the cast, even **Sean Connery** who appeared in the film for all of 12 seconds.

Robin of Loxley, who mustn't have got his Hood just yet, has to regain his confiscated property, including his main squeeze Marian, and avenge his murdered dad, all due to Alan Rickman's utter bastardry. But is our own Kevin Costner up to the task? Probably not, he's too '90s by far. Robin has an impressive map of places to explore as he tries to assemble his merry men, including Baldrick and the Cat from Red Dwarf, and get his **Thieves' School** up and running. Hey, didn't these **World XXI Soft** guys make that game already, and it was great? Anyway, he can fight using a stout stick or his bow, both of which require a bit of practice. And 'borrowing' people's money can help towards buying health potions and honing those combat skills further.

This game is in **BASIC**. Yeah right, what magical form of **BASIC** is this then? It just can't be - things move as they should at the right speed and everything. I'm not trying to be insulting, it's a compliment really. **Football Manager** is in **BASIC**. **Race Ace** is in **BASIC**. This... well it just can't be, any more than 1% of it anyway. But it must be, as it was entered in a compo called **Bytemaniacs' Concurso Basic 2022**, and obviously won. However looking at the other entries **Loxley** kinda resembles Ben Johnson when he won that runny event in the '80s. The other games' authors must surely have requested that Sr. Ruiz take a drugs test afterwards.

Which is all my twisted way of declaring **Loxley** to be a modern marvel. It's an enjoyable quest with the wide-open map a brilliant idea for offering welcome variety. You face different challenges in each area and doing them in the best order is your key mission. The combat is good fun, particularly poinging arrows all over the shop, and there's a sense of an interesting story developing all the while. It looks awesome, moves like Jagger and overall it's one of the last few years' top Speccy experiences. So don your hood and go pi\$\$ off the Sheriff for a bit, it's a right lark.



*A moody, broody Hallowed Knight pretends
he's Batman*

*Platform country here. You have to be careful
with your jumping and/or whacking*



*Insect Obi-Wan Kenobi welcomes you to
beautiful Dirtmouth*

*A high-speed hedgehog blasts past. To be
avoided*



People seem to like *Hollow Knight* on PS4, but for the life of me I don't know why. I've tried playing it quite a few times now and have got virtually nowhere, finding it to be a rather dull experience. Spaniards *E.V.J.G.* have gone and made a Spectrum version of it though, so maybe I'll have more luck with this. They've also recently converted *Little Nightmares* into *Tiny Nightmares* on the Spec, the little tinkers. How do they get away with it? Good on them though, can I have a conversion of *Cyberpunk 2077* next please?

You're a horny little knight who must discover the subterranean secrets of the world of *Hallownest*, which is overrun by pesky insects. Why I don't know, but it's a hobby I guess. The locals ask you to do the odd quest like finding a caterpillar's 10 lost children. Social Services must surely be notified. There's a trader guy, from whom you can buy spells. You can use your stubby little sword to whack the insects and gain currency, known as geos. You can sit on a bench which serves as a checkpoint. Thrills, spills!

But more interestingly, when you've whacked a few bugs upside of their heads, you can use their souls to restore one or more of your lives, up to the maximum of five. This is a feature the original game had too, possibly the most unique thing about it, so it's nice to see it on the Speccy version too. And you can't die as such, you just go back to whichever bench your behind last darkened.

So it's a different angle on the platform game and with more adventurey elements to keep you awake. The graphics are bijou but cute, colour is mostly blue and white but that's okay, and sound is a bit muted apart from a menu screen ditty. But this is a pretty diverting way to spend a few hours, and the idea of converting, or maybe subverting, console games is inspired. I got further in this game than its PS4 counterpart and had more fun getting there. So there you have it: the Spectrum is mightier than the Sony. I knew it.

IT'S... THE SCORES!



LOXLEY 91%

HALLOWED KNIGHT 84%



OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART 2



INSERT COIN

XECUTOR

(Ace Software,
October 1987)

Christian Urquhart did a lot of games in his time, from Transversion to

Snoopy or thereabouts. And they were mostly characterised by big colourful sprites, much like this game, one of not very many by Ace Software. So was it ace, or could Quasimodo have done better?

PRESS START

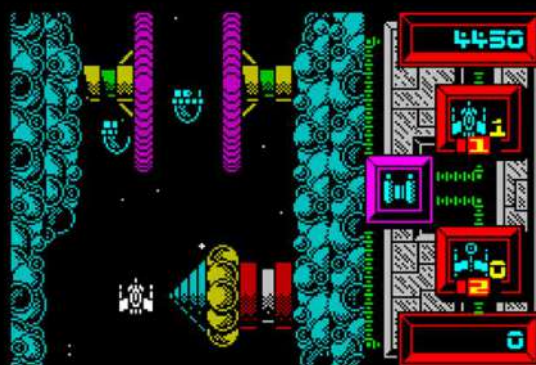
Super colourful, a real arcade look to the game

Really nice graphics with neat detailed sprites

Game keeps scrolling even when you die - sometimes this is the best way to progress!

Good variety of weapons, though you need the better ones earlier

2 players at once is possible, if you can find the room...





GAME OVER

Outrageously cramped playing area. Everything is way too tight

Far too hard generally, super unforgiving from the word go

Not very playable as a result
- a punishing start will drive most people mad

Just the 3 lives. Really?

Far too often an average go lasts about half a minute.
Did I mention it's hard?!?

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 84%

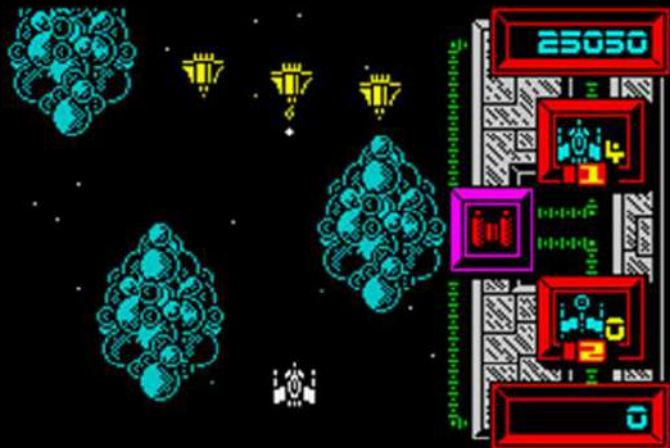
YS - 9/10 Megagame

SU - 10/10 Classic

Ace Magazine (no relation) - 76%

S.C. user score - 77%

* OVERALL 84% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 90%

Playability - 55%

Unique Features - 75%

* OVERALL 73% *

OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART 2



INSERT COIN

FLYING SHARK

(Firebird, February 1988)

Not entirely sure how different this coin-op

was to 1942, or 1943 for that matter, but Firebird managed to get Dom 'Zynaps' Robinson on board for this one, hoping for a barnstorming result. But could he do uppy downy shmups as well as he could do lefty righty shmups? And surely it would be packed with colour, like the Z game was?

PRESS START

Extra lives are given now and then, which is unusually kind

The graphics are crisp and detailed enough

Quite playable, with no buildings you can crash into (unlike Uridium)

The smart bombs are useful things to have on you in a tight spot

Good checkpoints help things progress nicely





GAME OVER

Annoying repetitive sound FX are disappointing, given the game's release date

No variation in colour, with bullets often going missing

Lack of variety in enemy and terrain can make things dull

No other weapons that I've found bar bombs, just keep shooting those bullets

It's not a shark, it's a plane! Like duh...

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 85%

YS - 9/10 Megagame

SU - 10/10 Classic

Ace Magazine - 89%

S.C. user score - 79%

* OVERALL 88% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 74%

Playability - 80%

Unique Features - 75%

* OVERALL 76% *



OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART 2



INSERT COIN

SALAMANDER

(Konami, February 1988)

Some debate over who actually released this

sequel to Nemesis, as sources are divided between Konami and Imagine. Think Konami tried first, then realised they weren't very good at marketing, or Spectrum games generally, so tossed it over to the Imagineers. Would this game make more of an impact than its predecessor? And what does it have to do with salamanders?

PRESS START

Great load screen, promises excitement to come...

Weapons choice is good, including diagonal fire. And laser FTW!

Those big grabby arms are cool and unique

Sound FX are okay, not too grating

The game is colourful in bits despite the nearly all white sprites used





GAME OVER

Poor menu tune, not smacking of arcadeness

Those annoying repetitive waves at the start to get your weapons, a la Nemesis

Those big grabby arms are actually a total pain!

Incredibly narrow landscape very near the start

With only 3 lives you have to do the first stage over and over and over and...

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 79%

YS - 4/10 (Wow)

SU - 8/10

Ace Magazine - 88%

C&VG - 65%

Games Machine - 52%

S.C. user score - 55%

* OVERALL 66% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 80%

Playability - 65%

Unique Features - 80%

* OVERALL 75% *



OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART 2



INSERT COIN

R-TYPE

*(Electric Dreams,
December 1988)*

Before R-Type, Bob Pape's only claim to fame was

doing the Speccy version of Rampage, which I rather enjoyed. He wrote a book about making this game called "It's Behind You" oddly, have to have a nosey at that some time. All programmers really should read it as well, as he seemed to be possessed by the devil when making this game, like Robert Johnson at the crossroads. Did he sell his soul?

PRESS START

Brilliant graphics, really pushing the machine to its limits

Astonishing use of colour - what colour clash?!

Variety of weaponry is impressive

Runs super-fast without being unplayable

Fiendishly playable and addictive thanks to decent checkpoints





GAME OVER

Your ship looks like it's got a droopy... nose

Some very pernicky end-of-level situations with little room to breathe

The game might be a little too quick for its own good

There are no Jaguars in the game despite its title

This game failed to bring about world peace as we know it... as yet

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 92% Smash

YS - 9/10 Megagame

SU - 90% Classic

Ace Magazine - 87%

C&VG - 93%

Games Machine - 90%

S.C. user score - 84%

* OVERALL 89% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 93%

Playability - 88%

Unique Features - 89%

* OVERALL 90% *

OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT. PART 2

INSERT COIN



SILKWORM

(Virgin Games, July 1989)

So we've had a few vertical planey shmups,

now for a horizontal helicoptery one. I've not actually been in a helicopter (as I'm still alive) and it does worry me how you could probably bring them down far too easily by just shooting at the blades. Could this be a significant handicap for this, the last of our old skool shooters?

PRESS START

2 people can play at once,
one in heli and one in jeep

Super quick arcade speed
action

Straight and diagonal firing
all at once means the enemies
are toast

Nicely defined graphics, even
if they're monochrome

You at least get 4 lives,
marginally more generous than
the norm





GAME OVER

Really pointless loading screen for some reason

Boring colour, mostly just whiteness everywhere

The game borders on being too easy if you use both heli and jeep

The dull sound FX could be so much better

The end of level boss helicopter looks like a weird goldfish

HIGH SCORE

Crash - 73%

YS - 90% Megagame

SU - 86% Classic

C&VG - 80%

Games Machine - 77%

S.C. user score - 77%

* OVERALL 81% *



A Dinosaur's Opinion

Arcade Styling - 70%

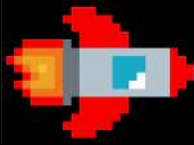
Playability - 80%

Unique Features - 85%

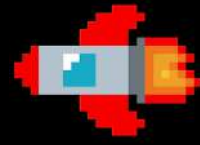
* OVERALL 78% *



OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT



THE RESULTS!



TOP TEN ACCORDING TO THE MAGS

1. R-TYPE



2. FLYING SHARK



3. ZYNAPS



4. XECUTOR



5. LIGHT FORCE



6. SILKWORM



7. 1942



8. NEMESIS



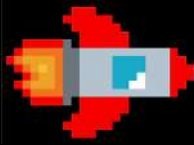
9. MOON CRESTA



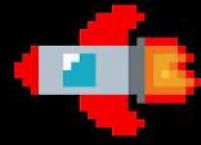
10. SALAMANDER



OLD-SKOOL SHOOT-OUT



THE RESULTS!



EXTINCT JIM'S TOP TEN PICKS



1. **R-TYPE** 

2. **ZYNAPS** 

3. **LIGHT FORCE** 

4. **MOON CRESTA** 

5. **SILKWORM** 

6. **1942** 

7. **FLYING SHARK** 

8. **SALAMANDER** 

9. **XECUTOR** 

10. **NEMESIS** 

AGENT X in THE BRAIN DRAIN CAPER

& AGENT X II: THE MAD PROF'S BACK!

(Mastertronic, 1986 & 1987)

You never quite knew what you were going to get with **Mastertronic**. For every **Finders Keepers** there was a **Voyage Into The Unknown**. So it paid to do a little research in advance, though they always gave you a screenshot or two on the inlay to help you out a bit. Some games look too good to be rubbish, and this one was certainly quite the looker, so how good was it actually?

A stereotypical mad professor has only gone and kidnapped the president! Please let it be Trump. You, as the chain-smoking Inspector Gadget sans the gadgets, **Agent X** are just the man to get him back, dead or alive. But preferably alive if we're being honest. First you have to drive to his lab, cunningly hidden in a mine. The road section scrolls diagonally like **Highway Encounter**, and you have to make sure your Gadget Car doesn't get nudged into any big potholes (*bloody council!*). This bit looks great and is a gentle start to your quest, since you'd have to be a total numpty to fail it.

Next find the prez in the mine, kicking your way past the robot guards in a **Kung Fu Master** stylee, timing of your kicks and jumps being the thing. I'm sure I saw **Donkey Kong** career past me in a mincart at one point, but that might just be flashbacks.

Then things get harder as you must shoot various objects the mad Prof lobbs at you (*used tissues, his undies etc.*) before they hit you in the mush. This gets fast after a while and is usually as far as I get when playing this game. Unless you slow it down in an emulator of course, gwahaha. Finally you can helicopter away to safety, preferably not forgetting the POTUS, praying to God you don't run into any of those godforsaken **Airwolf** walls.

All the levels are quite different and quirky, with great visuals throughout, not to mention Tim Follin's outstanding music on the menu screen. But I think where the authors have nailed it is the way your health level is always carried over into the next stage, making it essential that you keep as much in reserve as possible at all times, and ensuring things stay quite frantic through all the levels. On the whole, a really good budget offering with variety to burn, a little reminiscent of **Future Games**, another 'Tronics winner.



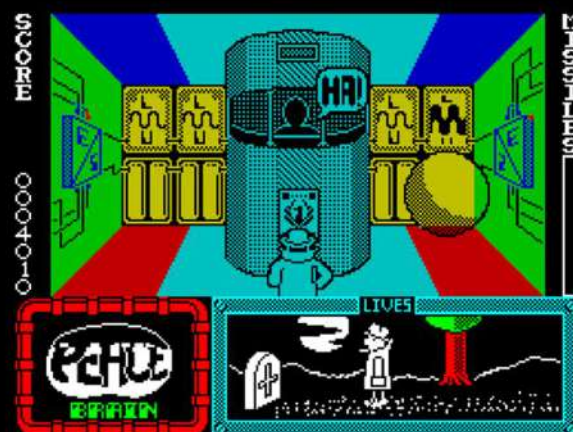
I think Mr. Gremlin liked Turbo Esprits as much as I did in the '80s

And who didn't want a cool jumping car with a big rear spoiler? I still do



It's getting tasty down in the mine but X still keeps that fog lit regardless

The mad prof has clearly been swotting up on his evil villain banter



Every good game deserves a sequel, even if the odds are that we would have been better without one. This time the eponymous mad scientist is going to make the world's population insanely spotty with his Zit-Ray, then everyone will have to buy spot cream by the ton and the global economy will fall over. And in the land of the spotty, the spotless man (*that's the Prof*) is king. What an odd plan, couldn't he just murder everyone instead? Typical megalomaniac over-elaboration I suppose.

We're treated to a mere three games this time round, not the four of the original title. So they should be better, right? Let's see. First Gadget, sorry **Agent X**, must simply fly to the moon with his jetpac(k) and infiltrate the loony's lunar base. It's basically a horizontal scrolly shooter which looks quite nice, but plays rather generically despite a quite brilliant Follin eargasm. Although the impressively spooky tune surely belongs in some other game, you'd say.

In stage two, X has to jump up and down various levels of the base, trying to collect codes to enter into security computers. This part seems very awkward and I struggled to make much headway. Again it looks alright, but the gameplay is really quite annoying, the enemies constantly managing to hit you and deplete your strength rapidly. Me no like.

And the last level is a pain too. It's **Arkanoid**, Jim and *exactly* as we know it. Only there are way too many bricks, the Prof has a bat too, and it's way too fast to enjoy until you crank it down some in your emulator. Then it's just plain dull.

There's no carry-through of X's health level, unlike the original game, and this pretty much nullifies a lot of the tension that that game generated. And despite impressive presentation throughout, unfortunately the three games are highly standard and forgettable, lacking the first title's quirky charm. I suspect this might have been quite a hurried affair and it shows. Not quite **X-rated** but a definite comedown.

X-RATED SCORING

AGENT X in THE BRAIN DRAIN CAPER

83%



AGENT X II: THE MAD PROF'S BACK!

56%



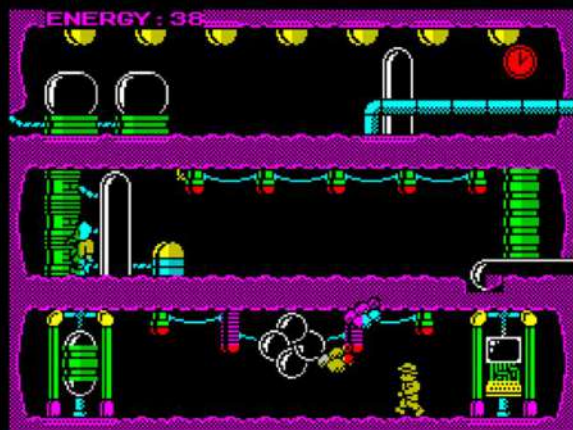


So, Mad Prof, which of the two Agent X games is the better?

Like Sidewize but with more colour and ace sound. And... lemon drops...



X has given up smoking and now wishes he hadn't



Play 'Exploding Wall' instead of this, it's much more fun. So's 'Thru' The Wall'





The odds are that if you smoke him a kipper, he'll almost certainly be back for breakfast

Ah, there's the exit, but you've not got the key, numbnuts! Quick, 6.9 seconds to find it...



(The) Hardy's quiff looks splendid in-game, but has flopped badly on the 'lives' bar

Space Monsters, meet the Hardy. The Hardy, meet Space Monsters. I thank you



SPACE MONSTERS MEET THE HARDY

(Mayhem. 2019) &

VALUATION: ESCAPE THE PIRATE PLANET

(Prytronik. 2017)

This game was made by **Mayhem and Conscience**, who must be mates with Chase and Status. Really they're two Russian chaps who seem to have made a few relatively low-key Speccy titles through the years, but this is their biggy. It claimed the silver medal at the 2019 Yandex Retro Games Battle, which sounds highly impressive given the level of competition at the time, beaten only by the outrageous **Valley Of Rains**. And it came 8th in *Planeta Sinclair's* Game of the Year compo for 2019 too, which doesn't win a medal unfortunately, but it's nice to be mentioned in dispatches. Our hero, '*The Hardy*' bears some similarity to a certain Mr. Dare who had 3 largely successful outings on the Spectrum, so how does he compare?

The inlay says you play as Hardy, not '*The Hardy*' but I guess maybe that's his nickname, like I sometimes insist on people calling me '*The AI*', especially on Tuesdays. In other words he's high maintenance! It looks like the creators haven't cooked up a convoluted plot for (The) Hardy, which is a shame as surely some ludicrous comedy space fiction would lend itself nicely here. It simply says "*your task is to find and neutralise all the space monsters that lurk around a multi-level maze*". Bit boring really. On each level you must find the key to an elevator while avoiding the meanies, but the catch is you are given a remarkably skinny time limit to do this. So (The) Hardy experiences short, sharp, spasms of action at a time, which is probably not good for you.

Each level consists of a few screens to start with, but as you progress there are as many as ten or so. It's a case of find the key, dodge or shoot the aliens, then high-tail it to the elevator, all in about 30 seconds-ish. Quite stressful, but at least you can take a few hits from the aliens before falling over, so it could be worse. The most annoying aspect of the game is the many spikes that are placed strategically on the ground so that when you jump carelessly, they spike you, and if you don't move pretty darn fast, they'll keep spiking you until you cark. Compared to the spikes, the aliens aren't too bothersome, and you can shoot them too if you're canny.

S.M.M.T.H. has some rather lovely multicolour graphics - they're small but perfectly formed, which is all very pleasant. And there's a great, if slightly grating, AY tune playing all the while, so overall presentation is top notchville. The idea of only having a very meagre time limit to complete each level is quite a novel one in the



Vallation means "a rampart or the process of constructing same". Tres relevant, n'est-ce pas?

*Your ship unfortunately has dandruff.
Should have used Head & Shoulders*



Some of those PITA rockets here, which trigger after you've protruded a pixel or three towards them

*The Pirate Planet is quite a pretty place
really, not sure I want to escape it*



Spectrum world of games, so plus points for that also. The only thing this game falls down on is the frustration factor. After you've failed a level a few times, which you will, it just gets very irritating, and you tend to mess up your controls frequently in your haste to get to the finish in time, which again gets your goat. But despite the annoyances, this is still a smart game which is fun to play, albeit in short spurts only. Poor **Dan Dare** would have a coronary trying to do this \$h1t.

Onto **Vallation** now, and is it *really* okay to do a conversion of a **Commodore 64** game? It's a tricky moral dilemma. On the one hand, it's nice to branch out and widen our world views somewhat, but on the other... it's a Commodore 64 game! Do we really want those '50 *Shades of Brown*' graphics associated with our colourful wonder? I am only joking (*a bit*), but it's all the funnier since it's mostly God's honest truth. Actually the C64 game was only made in 2013, not the '80s, so I suppose on that basis, it can be allowed. On this occasion only. No more, mind.

The plot can be summarised in 4 words - ***Escape the Pirate Planet!*** I'm not sure who you/we are but we're in a spaceship and it's vitally important that we escape the pirate planet! Various pirates (*presumably*) are trying to prevent you from escaping the pirate planet! They shoot you and fire missiles at you and are generally nasty to you, so you have to be bloomin' careful with your lives, or else you'll never escape the pirate planet! There are lots of levels with many screens on each, so it'll take you quite some time to eventually... (*"Oh shut up FFS"-Ed.*)

It's all very familiar territory to anyone who's au fait with some of Rafaele Cecco's fine work back in the day. Although to be fair it's... more humane to play than either **Cybernoid**, but isn't nearly up to that level of bells and whistles. It came with an updated 128k version which sadly I couldn't get to work at all, with extra music and levels, and the artwork was by the legendary Oli Frey, with Simon Butler pitching in for some graphics, so quite a **Crash**-y affair there. A lot of work has gone into the presentation, which is commendable.

It plays quite nicely too, your ship moves around smoothly and it's easy enough to get through quite a few screens and zap quite a few pirates, although most seem to need rather too many shots to dispatch on the whole. And as far as I got, things were threatening to get a tad repetitive if I'm honest, but this is worth a quick play in anyone's book, especially those who deem it of the highest possible importance that they esc... (*"I'm going to kill you now"-Ed.*)

SPACE SCORES



SPACE MONSTERS MEET THE HARDY 87%

VALLATION: ESCAPE THE PIRATE PLANET 77%



BUBBLE BOBBLE (Firebird, 1987)

& RAINBOW ISLANDS (Ocean, 1990)

I'm not sure why I'm reviewing these two games, they're a bit mainstream for my usual obscure tastes. But I've got heavily into doing 'foofers' of late and thought these would go rather nicely together. It was suggested to me recently, as a joke admittedly, that I review **Manic Miner**. But I'm not sure where I'd begin – trying to say anything remotely original about that game seems impossible, and I'm not really into repeating what other people say ad nauseam, I'll leave that to plenty of others who are quite happy to do it on Facebook and Youtube. *Miaow!*

So **Bubble Bobble** it is then. A **Firebird** arcade conversion, which U. S. Gold must have missed somehow. It's quite cutesy isn't it, let's check the inlay. Bub and Bob are dinosaurs and they've lost their jurassic main squeezes, the dino doofuses! There are apparently 100 caves in the way, which sounds like quite a drag, but dinos gotta get some dino lovin', otherwise they'll all die out. Oh wait.

Their main weapon is blowing bubbles since they're too cute to actually fight the cave dwellers properly. Once they've trapped a pest in a bubble, they then pop it and the pest's gone, and turns into fruit to eat very logically. Watery bubbles can also be popped and ridden, and if you spot an umbrella, that will send you onward 5 screens all at once. It's a Japanese arcade game, it doesn't have to make sense, just enjoy the mad ride.

Before I summarise, m'lud, let's see what those '80s rags made of BB, that's always fun. Well actually it's a bit boring this time round, everyone loved the arse off it. Oh except for SU, trust them! *8/10* only. **Tamara Howard** called it "*nauseatingly cute*" with "*love/hate potential*". Not hardcore enough for Ms. Blood & Guts, I guess. Not that anyone cared, but **The Games Machine** (*who?*) scoffed that "*Firebird could hardly fail, probably one of the easiest coin-ops to convert to the Spectrum*". I'd like to see them try themselves, cheeky twonks!

So what do I think? I can't disagree with those who love it. It's such a simple game, but deceptively tricky to get far into (*level 20 was my best effort*). Reminds me of **Bomb Jack** in that respect, another relatively simple classic. The graphics are cute, it's true (*alright Tamara*) but full of character, there's colour by the bucketful and a cracking tune yet again from **Tim 'Tunes' Follin**, whose bro Mike wrote the game itself – a talented family indeed. It's dangerously addictive and even more so with the ace two player option. In short it's definitely a Spectral classic which still plays great after all this time.



The heroes of our game, Firebird and Taito

Garish level 12 wants to trick you into getting stuck in those long tubes either side



Bub (or Bob) stares in wonder at the shark creatures' indulgent self-portrait

Wow, how much junk food can you eat in one sitting? Yum



Three years later it was Ocean's turn to release the sequel to Bubble Bobble, **Rainbow Islands**. But wait. What does this have to do with our dino pals Bub and Bob? The R.I. protagonist appears to be a small rotund boy. Well, if you'd finished the first game you'd know. Bub and Bob regained their human form after defeating Baron von Blubba (*Jabba The Huff's best man*). Of course.

Now they've got more work to do. They got suckered into buying a timeshare in beautiful Rainbow Islands and all went well until the place was sent into turmoil by either the returning Count (*mind the spelling*) or bizarrely, Doh according to some sources. He must have got bored with all that **Arkanoid** faff and decided to branch out by infesting holiday destinations with cute monsters.

There are 7 groups of islands in the archaeopaelio... arcanepeloton... group of islands. Start with **Insect Island**, the least popular with tourists, then onto Combat Island, full of tanks shooting at you, and on it goes. On each level Bubbytopher, or possibly Bobert, must reach the very top by firing rainbows around, which he can climb on or destroy enemies with. He's got an infinite supply, so just let 'em rip. Just mind your chubby little noggin, as the monsters nearly always come from above, and contact with them is ouchy. When you win, fruit flies everywhere, yay! Not fruit flies the insects, ah never mind.

Let's do the usual and check out the gutter press before spouting my own uninformed opinion on the matter. History is repeating itself as all the mags rated it well into the 90% bracket. But I found one that didn't! Spain's **MicroHobby** mag thought that "*Buby Bob*" merited a paltry 89% and they added insult to injury by mis-naming it "*Rainbow Island*". Outrageous behaviour from our Hispanic cousins. It was probably too easy for them, with all their **Dinamic** games and all.

So am I going to buck the trend and be a controversial trailblazer in saying it's a load of tosh? Too right I am! It's far too colourful and noisy, the action is too fast and frantic, it's stupidly playable to an irresponsible degree and frankly nowhere near cute enough. The only good thing is there's no 2 player mode, so you have no choice but to suffer on your lonely ownsome. This game is truly the nadir of Spectrum software – avoid at all costs.

RAINBOW RATINGS



BUBBLE BOBBLE 92%

RAINBOW ISLANDS 94%





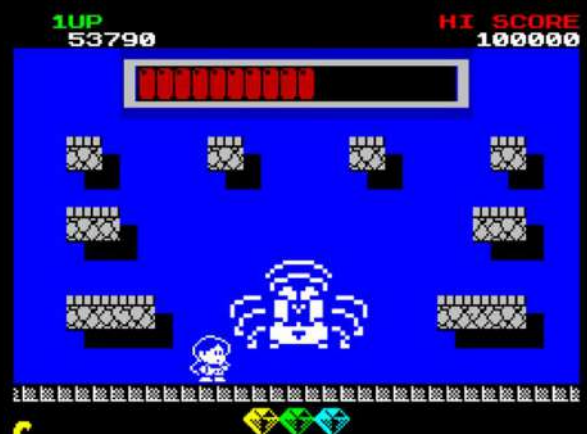
Billy Bunter vs. The Giant Bees was a classic comic

"Somewhere over the rainbow, colours claaaaaash" But really not much



Red Bull gives you wings on a lafer level

A boss level, but why are they so hideously blocky? This isn't the C64





Well this is nice isn't it? Cats threatening to do violence upon us

The cat goons both have an unfortunate attack of furballs at once



Ideally I'd like to see a sub-game here where the cats hijack this train. Zosya, sequel please!

"Running around robbing banks, all wacked up on Scooby Snacks"



BONNIE & CLYDE (Zosya, 2020) &

BOMB JACK II (Elite, 1987)

Sometimes it's fun to do a review featuring both a new game and an old one. No really, it is. Relatively speaking anyway. It's probably not fair to ask the question "Which is better?" so I won't do that (like *Meatloaf*). However, since I'm going to give them both a mark at the end, I guess I *am* effectively doing that. Anyway, it's alright, I don't think anyone is going to mind too much, I'm low-level at best.

I do try to avoid going over too well-trodden ground, so I've resisted the urge to go on about the original Bomb Jack, instead preferring to see if its relatively unloved sequel deserves better treatment in the enlightened year of our Sir Clive, 2024. But first a little look-see at a modern day Bomb Jack-a-like, if you a-like, *Bonnie And Clyde*.

We're all aware that in the olden days there was no shortage of Speccy pirates (*no names*), and even the odd few dandy highwaymen, but what about Spectrum gangsters? Well there were a few if I remember correctly. We had two games starring that *Mugsy* guy, featuring extraordinary graphics, if unextraordinary gameplay. And *They Stole A Million* was a bit of a cult hit, while *The Untouchables* even had their own outing late on in classic Spectral times.

It's a little-known fact, and one kept out of the history books, that 1930s bank robbers and general miscreants Bonnie and Clyde were in fact cats. I can well imagine cats doing that sort of thing, since their self-centredness and disregard for humanity would lend itself well to such activity. It's a good job we love the cute little b*****s isn't it? And this game is a true-life graphical representation of what they got up to, lovingly recreating their 90 greatest heists in 13 different localities. So it's a historical document really.

You play as *Clyde* cat and you must greedily collect all the coins in each area, while avoiding the many gangster cats around who like nothing better than to spray all around the area. Bullets, that is! Don't worry, the vet said they've all been 'done'. Once Fluffykins has collected all the coins, a big safe appears as if by magic. This is where *Bonnie* cat leaps into action as she's stashed some dynamite in her flea collar and throws it down to Clyde, who must catch it and blow the safe to smithereens. Then climb up a ladder to escape to the rooftops, like cats on hot tin rooves. Contemporary references, I got 'em.

Bonnie is useful in more ways too, as she lobs down whatever stuff she can find to aid Clyde's efforts. Like extra bullets, a star which freezes enemies and a temporary invulnerability cloak. Hope my cats aren't reading this, or they might ask for one of those for Xmas, the scamps. In this day and age, it's possibly a bit of a shame that you can't pick which gangster cat you'd like to play, so their roles might be reversed. After all, it was possible back in 1983 in *Antescher*. Oh, and you get nine lives, which is perfectly in tune with feline anthropological biology, so that's good.

Once you're past the excellent loading screen, your game menu pops up with a rather confusing message at the bottom, "© 1986 *Zosya Entertainment*". But this isn't one of those games which was made in the ancient times, but not released for whatever reason. No, it's simply those cheeky Russian folk having a bit of a joke, albeit a slightly odd one. Bomb Jack came out for the Speccy in '86, so I can only assume that's why that year was chosen, as there's a passing resemblance to that game. But your kitty can't fly in this game, so there's a major difference there I suppose. But could Bomb Jack fire bullets? No siree, but good old Clyde can.

There's some good music on the menu screen, but it's that quiet Tim Follin type, you know the sort. It's clever, but it's a shame it tends to be rather low volumed in comparison to the effects in the game itself. However some period-appropriate *Scott Joplin* tunes play away quite happily during the game itself, so that's all good, including "The Entertainer" which is nice to hear outside of the snooker for a change.

This game is very simple to play, a la B.J.'s first outing, and everything zips around very swiftly and smoothly. It's not hard to complete a few screens, so you can tell it's not a classic era game, and being given nine lives, you'll probably get quite far into it on a regular basis. I got as far as level 17, but out of 90 that's just a drop in the ocean.



*Didn't see any dragons, soldiers or
Maltesers funbags in this game*

*BJ has taken too long and now he faces
getting the horn 4 times over*



*"Don't go near Sydney Opera House. It's
infested with stinkin' dinosaurs"*

*"Stone 'Enge..." A Derek Smalls bass solo
plays endlessly in the background*



The difficulty level increases gradually, no nasty spikes that I noticed, although on screen 11 you are suddenly confronted with a monstrous climb that you can't possibly manage with one jump. This is where a further feline ability comes in essential – you can climb up super-high by bouncing off alternate walls, which took me a while to master, and even when I'd managed it, I wasn't quite sure how, but it's a bit like how **Mario** does it if that's any help.

So to wrap up Bonnie And Clyde, it's a cracking game, as you'd expect from the marvels at Zosya, whose only mis-step I can recall was the too-hard biker game **Just A Gal**, otherwise their output has been outstanding. It's colourful, looks and sounds fantastic, and is a total joy to play. And dare I say it, I prefer it to Bomb Jack, as there's a bit more variety on show, and who doesn't like shooting evil cats? (*I didn't really say that, please don't shoot any cats.*)

So out with the new and in with the old. **Bomb Jack II** came out less than a year after the original, with Elite not slow to try to capitalise on that game's popularity. Interestingly they put the original Bomb Jack on the B-side to its sequel, which was a marketing stroke of genius, as anyone who missed the first one could get that rarest thing in the world of non-budget Spectrum gaming – good value for money. Surely the best B-side in Spectrum history? It sure beats Palace's Cauldron B-side, **The Evil Dead**. Everybody loved ol' Bomb Jack, I've never heard anything said against it, apart from me a couple of paragraphs ago. Its genius was its simplicity, and it suited the Speccy down to the ground, making for an effortlessly top notch arcade convo. Then came number two, and... oh the disappointment...

The only mag to like it was the ever-erratic Sinclair User, who gave it 5 stars, saying it was "*at the top of the platform games league, outstripping **Legend Of Kage** with great ease (alright) and **Cobra** with style (now hold on)*". If you take them out of the equation, Y.S. reckoned 6/10 - "*not a complete disaster*" and Crash offered 71% - "*a poor follow-up which loses its predecessor's sparkle*". Harsh words indeed.

This time round Mr. B.J. (*to his close friends*) has found himself stuck in a lava pit crammed with reptilian creatures, must have been quite a party the night before. He has to stab his way out, which doesn't sound terribly heroic, more just thuggish, and get back to his home world of... maybe Bombonia, sounds plausible. He's got a knife ("*That's not a knife*") and can usually manage to shiv a creature or two before they get pi\$ed and beat the crap out of him.

He can't really fly this time, despite wearing a cape. All he can manage is to jump to any platform which is on the same level horizontally or vertically, so if they're even a little bit off-kilter, he can't do it. Some superhero! He has to collect all the various bits of treasure, as he's a keen capitalist, then he can move on. If he takes too long, the relatively docile dino creatures turn into hard-as-nails rhino types, who can't be stabbed with such ease. Wait even longer and they turn into copycat **Bomb Jacks** weirdly, which leaves our hero feeling like he has lost his sense of self, and he starts on a downward spiral of depression. Sad.

There are 40 screens to fight through, and it's quite hard going compared to the first game. More of a puzzly affair – it's important to plan your way around the screen to ensure success, as you can only get to certain platforms a particular way. Battling the monsters is a bit hit-and-miss, you're best to sneak up behind them and stab them in the back a few times (*charming*), otherwise they hit you back and deplete your health bar rapidly. At least they don't kill you immediately they touch you, but you often have your heart in your mouth, as you're a bit wimpy on the whole.

The graphics came in for some criticism, but I reckon they're not bad. Small but well designed, and the backgrounds are as colourful as the original. The reptiles have even made themselves a **Stonehenge** replica in their lava pit, which is impressive. I'm starting to think it's not really a lava pit at all to be honest, the evidence is not compelling.

Viewing this as a game in its own right, I think it's alright. Not revolutionary, but solid enough. It wasn't in the arcades, and is a quite different experience to the first game. There was another spin-off in the franchise, **Mighty Bomb Jack**, which was in the arcades, but never made it to the Spectrum. Could be a project for one of the current breed of Spectrum heroes to get their teeth into maybe. "*Your country needs you!*"

BOOM OR BUST?



BONNIE AND CLYDE

92%

BOMB JACK II

74%



20 MODS, CLONES & RE-CRACKS, PART 1



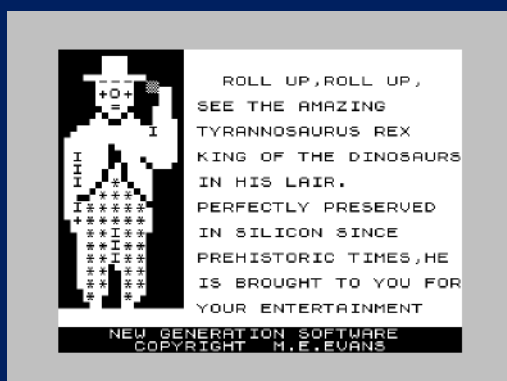
3D MONSTER MAZE

(J.K. Greye, 1982 & Paul Farrow, 2016)

I must have only been about 9 when I had my first home computer, the good old **ZX81**. It was great for really simplistic games, not big on graphics, colour or sound but at the time it seemed pretty bitchin'. I didn't possess any of the best games for it, like the Software Farm titles or this one, which a certain **Malcolm "Don't Call Me Trashman" Evans** produced for the mysterious J.K. (*Gandalf the*) Greye.

So I never played this at the time, and it's fair to say things have moved on considerably since then. But for the time this was absolutely breathtaking stuff. Mr. Evans has always enjoyed tinkering with 3D effects and quite how he produced this with such limited material beggars belief. The main dino graphic is hellablocky, sure, but must have been really impressive and genuinely terrifying back then, I'd have thought. Okay, play it now and it's not quite the same, but compare other ZX81 games to this and you can see true genius at play.

Paul Farrow seems to enjoy converting ZX81 games to the Speccy, an unusual hobby but why not? He's had a few goes at this game, one in colour which looks quite nice even if I can't find it anywhere. The version I played seems to be a straight convo, but does add a rather lovely colourful loading screen. It's an interesting look back at how things were when all this were fields.





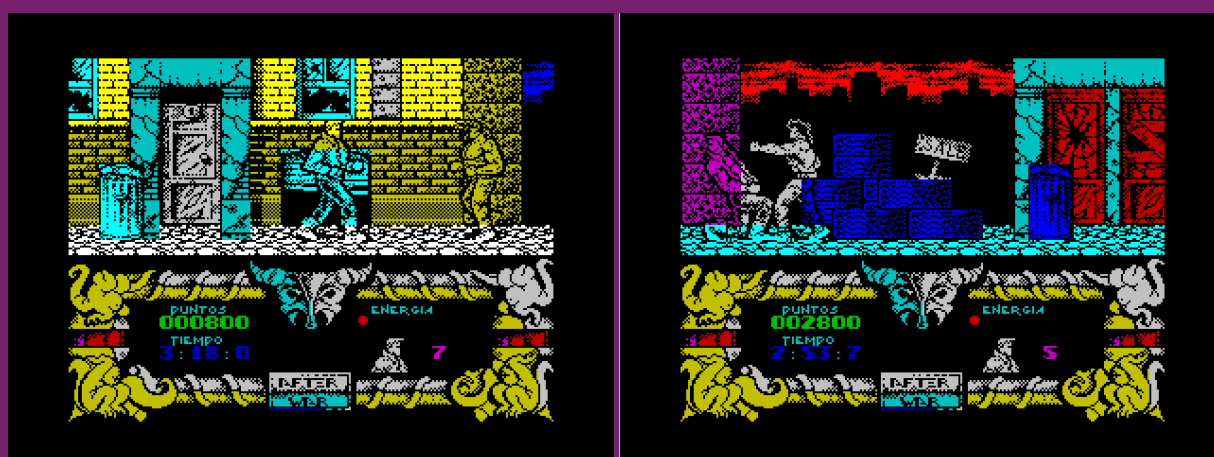
AFTER THE WAR

(Dinamic, 1989 & Rafal Miazga, 2012)

And here's me thinking this was a tune by '80s axe hero **Gary Moore**. But no, it was also a game by insane Spaniards Dinamic which must have made its way to these shores at some point, as Sinclairs *Your* and *User* both reviewed it, giving it roughly 7/10 on average, which ain't bad. While **MicroHobby** gave it a "Nuevo!" and "Scorchio!" I'm sorry, there was no excuse for that. With this being Dinamic, I'm afraid I'm contractually obliged to wheel out the usual tired references to games being stupidly difficult and often featuring artwork which includes at least half a nipple. There, I've said it now, we can move on.

Does it also feature a gung-ho macho soldier with a flat-top? Why, yes it does, how did you know that? His name is "**Jungle**" **Rogers** (*brilliant*) and he's stuck in 2019 Manhattan after a nuclear war. I don't remember that, I must be suffering from long covid. Mr. Jungle has to spray bullets at mutated survivors and reach a ship to get him off this godforsaken planet, 'cos you can do that in 2019. There are 2 loads to this, loads of levels and 20 different ways for your hero to move, according to the inlay. But mostly it's shooting and a bit of jumping here and there. Dinamic certainly give you value for money with the size of their games, but they're evil and don't want you to get off stage 1 generally.

It's been a short while since I've mentioned **Rafal Miazga's** name, but he's going to feature quite often in this here... feature, as he loves nothing more than colouring in old monochrome games with his felt-tip pens and making them all shiny like. He then calls the re-cracked game "*(Whatever) Reimagined*" which might be a bit of a stretch to be honest, but he sure does make some of them real purty, so well done him. And this game looks a real treat in glorious technicolour, so he's done a great job there. What else can we get him to do, let's think... how about something straightforward like **KNIGHT LORE**?





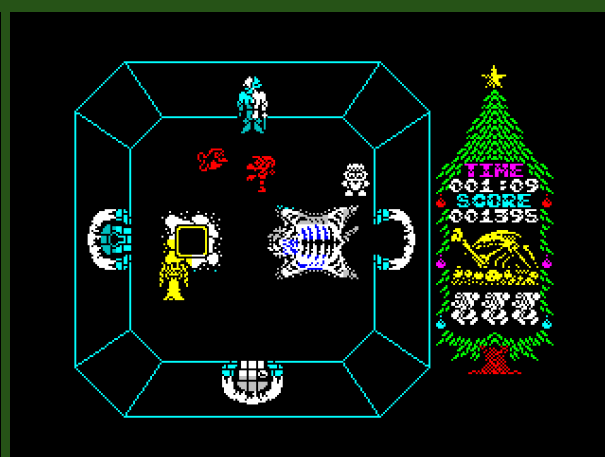
ARCTIC ATAC

(Ultimate, 1983 & Highrise, 2022)

Oh awesome, a Xmas mod! There have been quite a few Xmas-themed games for the Spectrum over the years, but really very few decent ones. And more recent efforts have tended to be good, but rather generic AGD platformers. But this looks very intriguing. Taking one of my absolute fave Spectral titles, not to mention one of the very rare games I actually managed to finish legitimately, and throwing a shedload of snow over it. Sounds like frantic festive fun or my name's not Bernard.

Do I have to explain *Atic Atac*? I suppose this bit will be a bit short if I don't. You, dressed up as a knight, serf or wizard, are stuck in a big old house, like the one in *Resident Evil*, and you have to find 3 pieces of the ACG (*stands for Ashby-de-la-Zouch*) key to get out, as some bugger has locked you in. Different characters have access to different areas, you can throw axes at monsters, and you're permanently starving like you've got some disease. It's amazing, even if the 'blerp' noise it makes every time you enter a room gave me nightmares when I was a kid.

And this add-on looks so darn pretty and snowy, it's gorgeous. It gives you the chance to re-play an absolute banger with a new twist, and it's so good it begs the following question. Please can someone invent a snowy mod that throws a 5h1t-ton of snow onto *any* game at all? I'd be impressed by that. *Commando* in the snow. *Delta's Shadow* in the snow. *Elite* in the snow of space. I'd also like a TV device that gathers together all the Xmas specials of your fave progs too while we're at it. Netflix isn't sentient enough yet to manage that. Well it doesn't hurt to ask for these things...





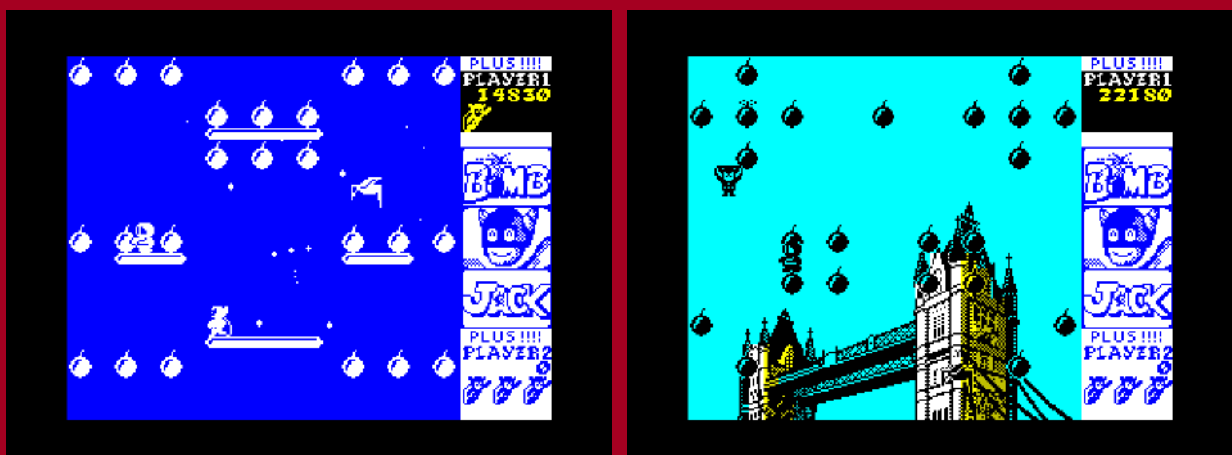
BOMB JACK +

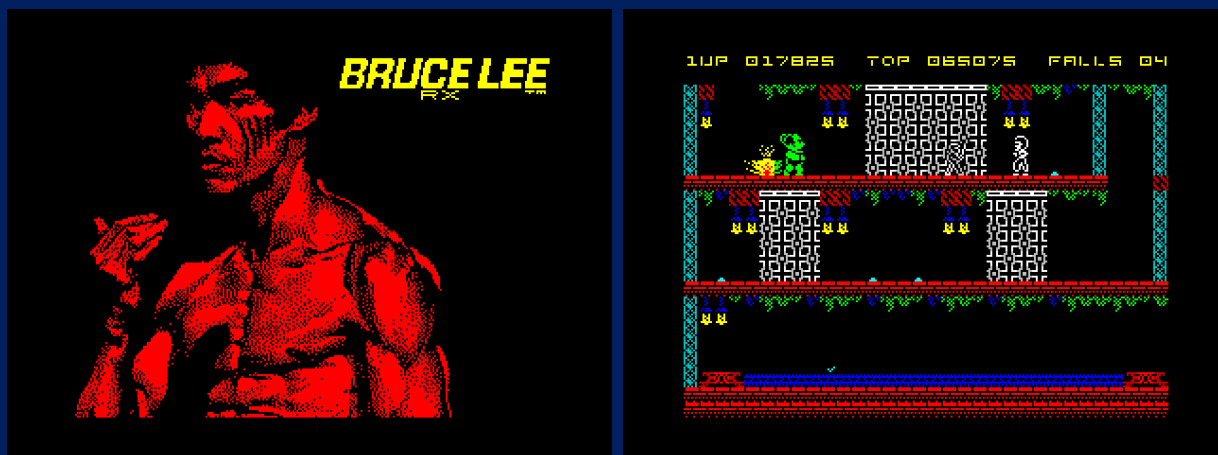
(Elite, 1986 & 4th Rock, 2018)

As we know, B.J. was very popular in the mid-'80s, as it is today. No seriously, the arcade game was well reproduced on the Specco, and we also had the dubious privilege of the sequel to follow it up. There was also **Mighty Bomb Jack** on consoles, a less fun side-scrolling affair, and in 1993 **Bomb Jack Twin** came to the arcades. Who cares, I hear you say. Well, a few years back someone decided to recreate B.J. Twin on the Speccy using a B.J. Editor made in 2005 by badass **BadBeard**, a software pirate if ever I've heard one.

Bomb Jack always struck me as a great fun, really pointless game. You jump around defusing bomb after bomb, dodging enormous grasshoppers, turning them into faces so you can gobble them. And keep doing just that until you get bored after half an hour or so. But it's hard to deny that by that point you'd have had a highly entertaining time. A little like **Bubble Bobble** I would say. It was nice and simple in essence, and that's probably why it converted really well to our fave micro computer. Apparently the C64 version was bobbins.

So what does this mod add? No music or graphical alterations as such, but you do get some new screens and layouts to enjoy, so it's all good. I managed to find a few before running out of talent, but I wonder how many there might be in total. One was green, one was rather minimalist and starry and one had **Tower Bridge** on it. And I consistently lost one life on each screen, so that all adds up to not many screens being found. But still, not bad, not bad.





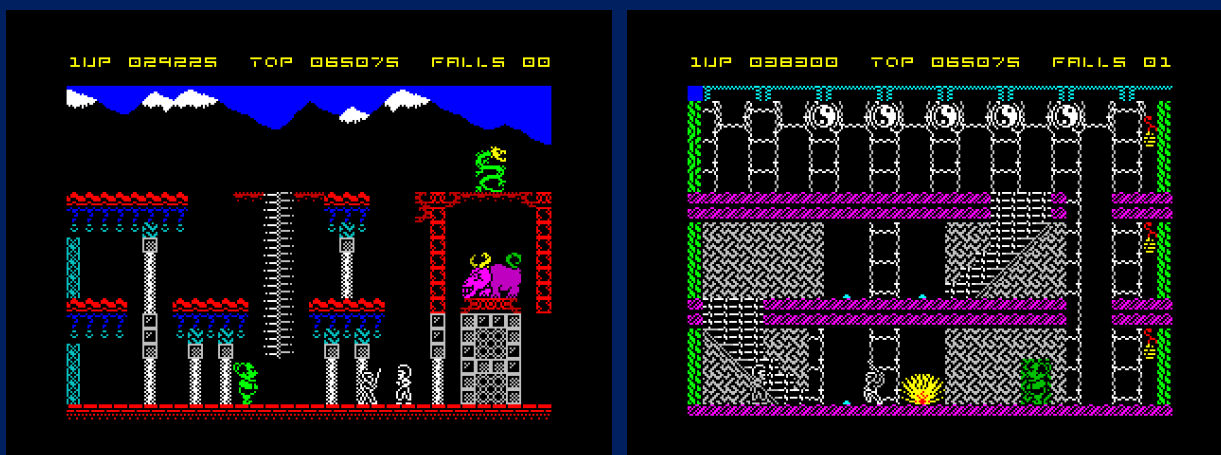
BRUCE LEE RX

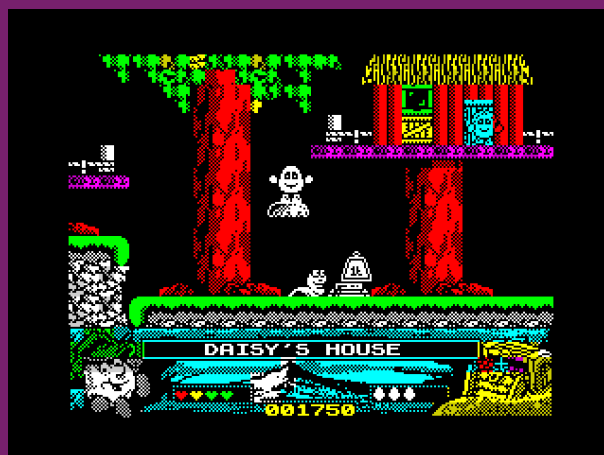
(U.S. Gold, 1985 & Allan Turvey, 2019)

As this feature will illustrate, some people really dig doing conversions and mods of games, even re-cracking them if they're particularly vicious, and **Allan Turvey** is one such. He's done Asteroids, Lunar Rescue, Roust as well as his own creations, plus one more to come in this list. What does **RX** stand for though? My guess is RemiX but that's almost certainly woefully incorrect.

Bruce Lee was a mega hit back in the day of course – one of those rare times that **U.S. Gold** got it just right. Two player fun was guaranteed and even if you were playing on your tod, the antics of Green Yamo and the Unnamed Little Guy With A Big Stick frequently caused hysterical outbursts as they died over and over and over and... Playabilitywise you couldn't knock it, so what's the point of re-doing it then, eh?

Well, a new coat of paint never hurt anybody as far as I'm aware, and this new version looks very fancy. There's a new load screen with the man himself, even though the original's was mighty impressive, plus a better font, and generally it's like a load of glitter has been emptied over the original game. And thankfully now **Green Yamo** really does live up to his name, while there are new sprites for Bruce and Stick-Ninja Dude too. Wonder if they ever did a version of this game for the **Dragon**? The ad would have practically written itself.





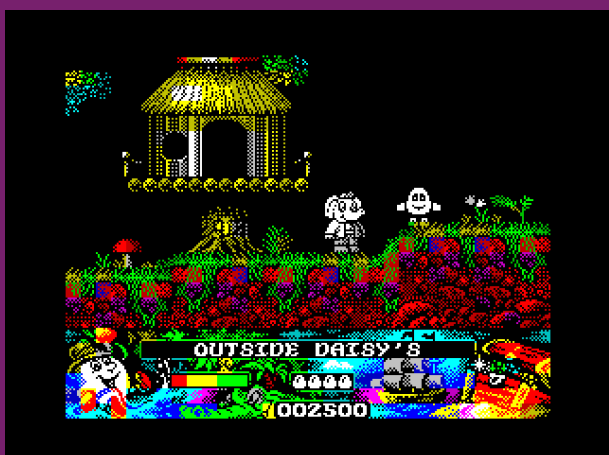
CRYSTAL KINGDOM DIZZY

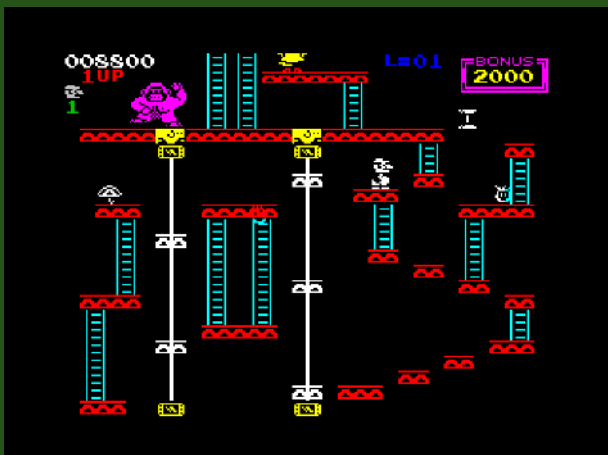
(Code Masters, 1992 & Evgeniy Barskiy, 2017)

Dizzy games have always been rather Marmitey. Loads of people love them, while older cynical types tend to opine that they're nothing new and it's all been done before. There were certainly enough of them, and Crystal Kingdom Dizzy was his seventh adventure to date when it was released back in 1992. If the Spectrum hadn't run out of steam, they'd probably have carried on indefinitely. Indeed, in 2020 a new game was made called **Wonderful Dizzy**, so the character clearly holds some enduring affection for many.

This time round those Yolk Folk have been negligent new-age types and have had their crystals stolen from them, and now their chakras are all misaligned. Dizzy must play the Good Egg once more and get them back. So off he goes doing favours for the locals, swapping objects, somersaulting impressively about the place (*bet **Magic Knight** couldn't do that, but then he was rather weighed down by armour*) and doing what he always does in every game all the time.

But he does do it well. In 2017 five top programmers, including **Ol-egg (geddit?) Origin**, went on a mission to overhaul Dizzy's seventh symphony. I think I'm right in saying the game remains the same but they've certainly made it shine. The graphics look dramatically better with even more colour than the original, and the music sounds pretty darn nice as well, plus there's a new loading screen to boot. 'New' Crash loved it and gave it an understated **98%**, which might be a tad exuberant, but it's still one of the better mods around without any doubt.





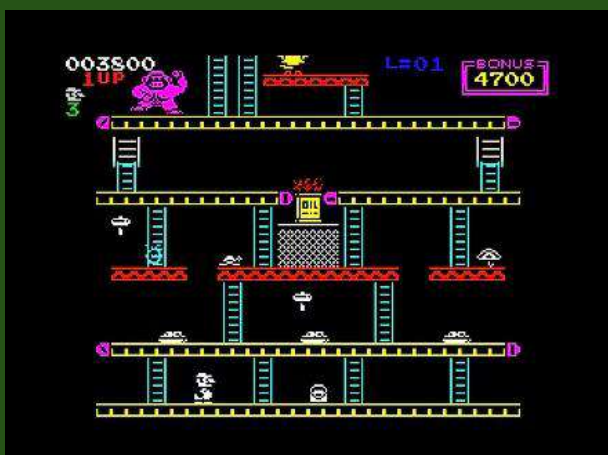
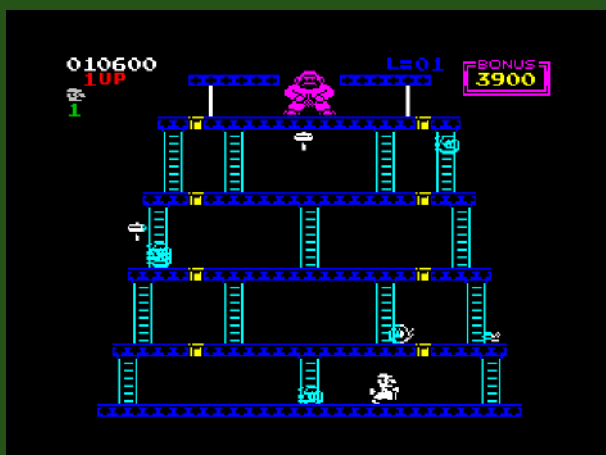
DONKEY KONG: ARCADE EDITION

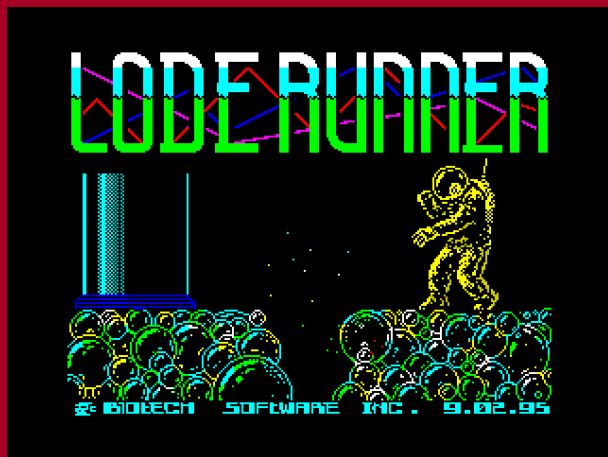
(Ocean, 1986 & Stuart Campbell, 2019)

How many goes did **Ocean** want at Donkey Kong games? I owned their certainly unlicensed first Kong effort as one of my very first Spectrum games, and it really wasn't too bad, if as difficult as you'd expect. Then they actually did bother to get the official 'Donkey Kong' licence in 1986, but it didn't differ that dramatically from the '83 version, and by then no-one much was interested in the game any more. Fun fact – he was originally called '**Donkey**' merely to convey the fact that he was stubborn like a mule. But the name stuck, as ridiculous as it seems, and D.K. has gone from strength to strength ever since. And he still hates Mario, but that's totally understandable.

As Mario's earlier incarnation **Jumpman** (*that name really wasn't very inspired, was it?*) you have to get your gal back from that damn dirty ape, climbing ever upwards through the levels while avoiding barrels, oil and monkey scat which Kong throws at you from time to time. As the game repeatedly quizzes you, to a highly annoying extent, "*How high can you get?*". They clearly haven't seen **Jay and Silent Bob** tackle this game yet.

I'm not too au fait with Ocean's 1986 rendition of the arcade classic, but it seems that this mod is just a bit of a re-paint to make the game resemble the original a bit more authentically. Ocean's version does seem a bit overly magenta by comparison now. It's as much or as little fun to play as any version, depending on your viewpoint, but personally I'll probably stick to playing the **Donkey Kong Country** games, which are surely the best platformers in the **Nintendoverse**. Eat it, Mario!





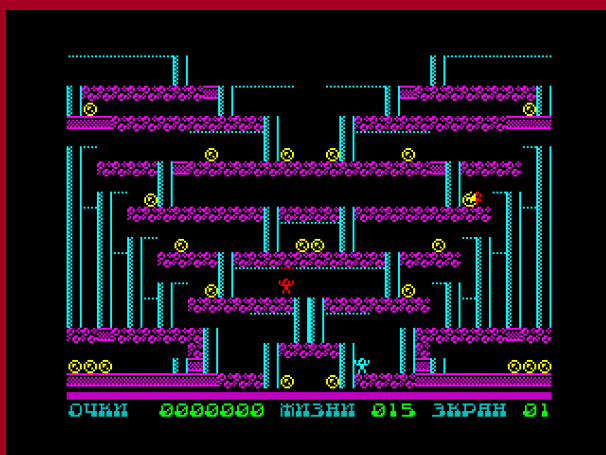
LODE RUNNER III

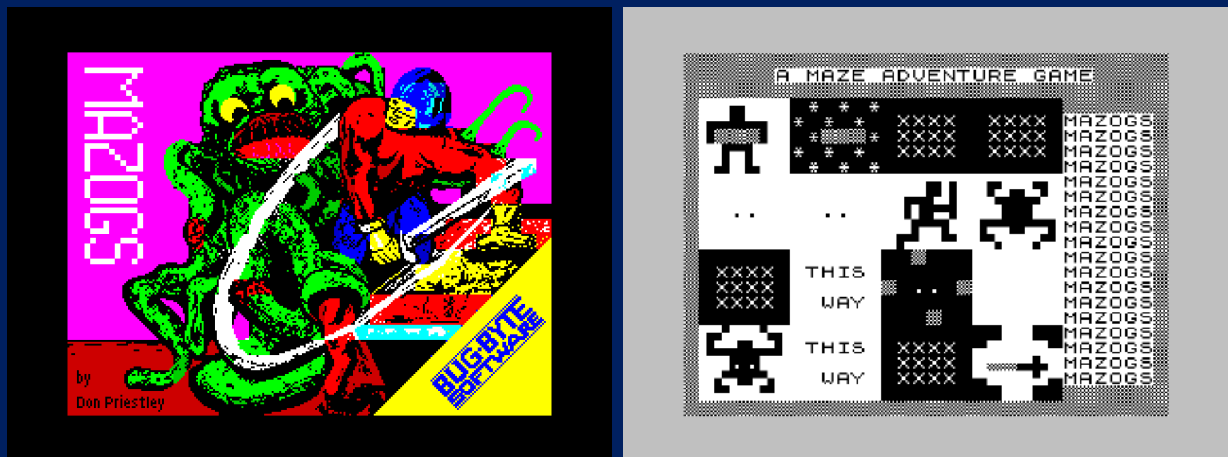
(Software Projects, 1984 & Biotech Software, 1995)

Way back in Orwellian 1984, **Software Projects** released surely the first ever mini-AGD game with Lode Runner. Most people liked it despite, or maybe because of, the teeny tiny sprites, which bucked the trend really when most people preferred their games *not* to have UGDs that looked like they came from a **Sinclair Programs** type-in. But it was certainly different and the game's playability won a lot of people round. And now look, there are loads of tiny graphics games! *Plus ça change*, as the French say, and no I'm not going to translate that.

You're a galactic commando whose mission is to recover all the gold ingots stolen by the Bungling Empire (*Tories*) from the peace-loving folk. You have a laser drilling pistol which you can use to chew through rocks up to a point, and naturally you have to avoid the Empire's bungling minions who hate your face. The game had 150 screens over 2 separate loads (*lodes?*) and also an editor, so if you could possibly think up a configuration not featured in those 150 screens, then you could have at it.

Apparently **Lode Runner 2** was a PC game, so ignore that. In 1995 Russians **Biotech Software** kindly gave us **Lode Runner 3**, in which your little cyan stick man has to go round collecting all the round yellow... lodes? So pretty similar, but again highly playable. The enemies are quite intelligent so trying not to get yourself cornered is always the challenge. I rather liked this after I'd managed to complete a few screens, so once again playability has triumphed over good looks it seems.





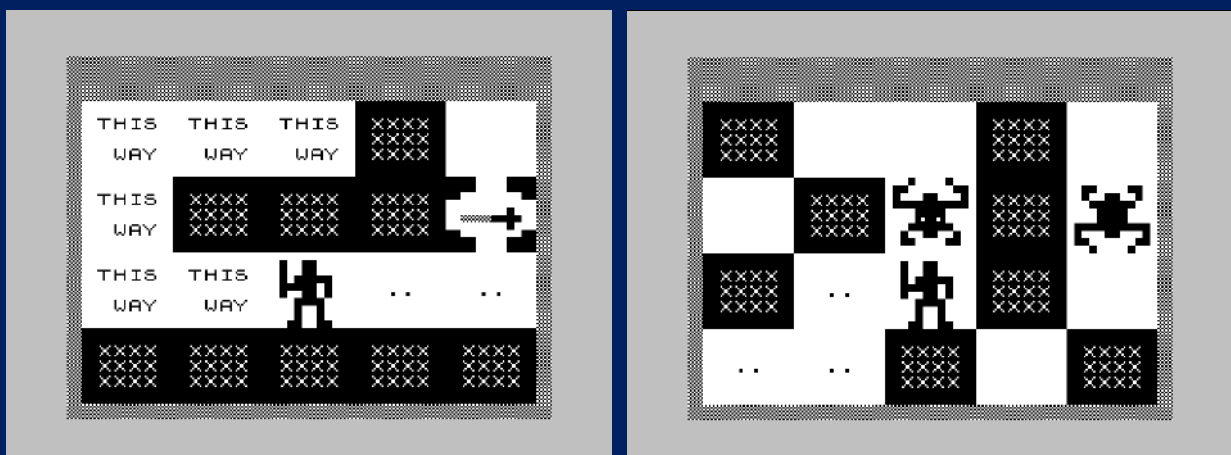
MAZOGS

(Bug-Byte, 1982 & Paul Farrow, 2017)

It's hard to imagine how things were back in '81 nowadays, and I doubt whether we'll ever see a bigger breakthrough in computerising than the leap from the mute black and white ZX81 to the noisy, violently colourful Spectrum. It really was a mindblowing upgrade. But for a while I was perfectly happy with my ZX81, since I was only 9 or so at the time. Don Priestley's Mazogs was one of the top games back then, though in honesty I was totally unaware of its existence. I did enjoy Maziacs of course, most people did, with its quirky sense of humour and amusingly animated monster fights, so this game is where all that began. And ultimately Don's obsession with enormous sprites. Can I get a *fnar*?

You're on the search for treasure (like Terrance and Phillip) and have found what looks like a huge maze. That's because it is a huge maze, but predictably it's full of nasty monsters who want your head on a plate. They call themselves the Mazogs. They probably don't but that's what you've decided to call them, and a catchy word it is too. You can find swords dotted around the place to dispatch said Mazogs with, and there are little sneaky eyes in the wall who can tell you the right way to go to get the stashes. There are a few different variations on the basic game available on the main menu, plus a randomly generated maze each time. Heady stuff for 1982, when a youthful Bug-Byte released it.

Like Monster Maze, Paul Farrow seems to have made a coloured version of this game as well, but the version I tried out was a faithful black and white reproduction of the original, aside from the rather lovely load screen. A chap called Russell Marks appears to have attempted the same before him too. It's still not a bad little game despite the intervening 42 (gulp) years and a timely reminder that there was indeed life before the Spectrum. Maybe not much, but some.





PAC-LAND REIMAGINED

(Grandslam, 1989 & Rafal Miazga, 2014)

Namco were determined to milk as much out of the cheeky yellow cheese as possible, but who could blame them when Pac-Man was such a phenomenon? At least this game isn't a direct rip-off, unlike **Ms. Pac-Man**. **Grandslam** converted it to the Spectrum in 1989 and lo, people deemed it to be "yeah, alright, I suppose". Our pal Rafal took it upon himself to give it a bit of a splash of colour a decade ago, as the original did lack it somewhat. Good lad.

Pac-Man has to return a fairy to Fairyland. Odd, but true. So he has to venture in a rightwise direction through four different landscapes, from his home in Pac-Land, but those pain in the arse ghosts still won't leave him alone. Can you name them? Pinky, Stinky, Malinky... Actually it's Blinky, Inky, Pinky and... Clyde (*an afterthought clearly*). They've even rented planes and automobiles, like **Steve Martin**, so they can stick it good to the Edam on legs. Can he ever catch a break?

There were a few million Pac spin-offs for this Speccy, I recall the 3D **Pacmania** among others. I'd not played this, but despite its fairly extreme simplicity it gets to be quite fun after a bit. You just go right, jump over the odd thing, avoid the odd thing, get a powerpill then run like stink. I think the colour is the only addition to the original, but it works well and gives extra eye candy which is always welcome.



TO BE CONTINUED!

GARFIELD: A WINTER'S TAIL

& SNOOPY *(The Edge, 1990)*

Time for some more gritty content on this site – two games that just *demand* to be taken seriously, none of my usual silly jokes this time round. This is *serious* stuff people, two gut-wrenching tales of grim post-apocalyptic survival that will touch your heart and change your lives forever. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll sit patiently waiting for them to load. Coming to a screen near you. This year. Well, 34 years ago. Gulp.

This particular battle is to determine which is better – ZX cats or ZX dogs. I'm a committed cat person myself, but I do also like nice, docile pooches too. Not small yappy jumpy ones though, they're a nope for me. On the Speccy I can't recall many games involving our four-legged friends, unless you count wulfs I suppose, it's all moles and stoats and psycho pigs.

Garfield has previous, so let's start with him. In 1988 the edgy **The Edge** released the lethargic feline's first Spectrum adventure, "*Big Fat Hairy Deal*" and it was a big fat, hairy hit. Sinclair User went doolally yet again with a *10/10 Classic*. Is anything in life really that good? Crash thought a *90% Smash* was more like it, and I'm inclined to agree, while Y.S. were clearly dog lovers, giving it *7/10*. But overall the consensus was that a sound job had been done.

Two years passed, as they do, and those crazy Edgerunners thought they'd better do a follow-up, though oddly I don't remember it from the time at all. They got a different crew to do the programming, including a certain **Clive Townsend** apparently, and the result was an entirely different type of game. Or games really. Garfield was about to become an action hero, which I'd imagine wouldn't have pleased him even slightly.

The ginger one has been eating the contents of Jon's freezer, which sounds a bit hard on the teeth, and he's gone and fallen asleep for his 10th nap of the day (*always the best one*) right in front of it and left the thing open, the careless cat. He sleeps and he dreams... of things cold, wintry and vaguely food-related. So begins your journey into kitty dreams. He imagines himself skiing in the Alps, visiting a lasagne factory, then a chocolate factory, then skating on a lake in Switzerland, making his way across to eat more chocolate, it seems. Greedy boy!

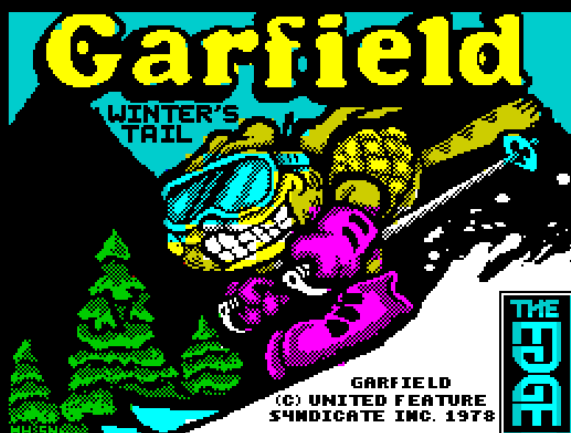
First impressions are that the loading screen is ace, I bet Clive did that one? Then we see the feline hero lying in his bed in front of the freezer. You can choose which level to practise here, but to play the game properly you have to do things in the 'right' order, starting with a trip down the slopes. I'm sure someone else '*went skiing*' at some point before this, but I can't remember for the life of me who... Thankfully there's no road to cross this time and you don't look like a terrifying freak. Garfield can't get rid of his nemesis **Odie**, who's even dogging him (*pardon*) in his dreams. He races down the slope alongside, getting in the way admirably as he so often does.

This bit looks great in stills, with the characters large and, well, characterful. But things do move rather slowly, but much better if you boost the speed with an emulator. You can jump over obstacles easily enough, and you need to ensure you don't get hungry on your run, otherwise you'll wake up and it's game over. So helpful folk at the side of the track will offer you pizza regularly, which you have to munch before Odie does. The inclusion of Odie is a bit weird – he stays the same distance alongside you all the way, and at first I thought I could guide him into obstacles, which would be a laff. But sadly he just jumps over them on his binlid. He'll generally eat the snacks on the left side of the screen, while you eat the ones on the right. This part really isn't too hard, so eases you in nicely I guess. Just don't fluff the big jump at the end or you'll have to start again.

Next stop is the lasagne factory, where you bash some keys fast and watch Big G munch some food. It's a cut-scene really, just to lead into the chocolate factory, which must be next door. I'm sure Iceland did a chocolate lasagne once, didn't they, maybe they were made here?

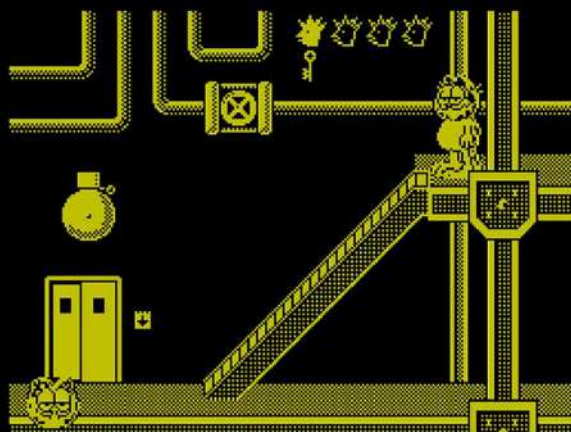
Our mog's had his main course (*pizza, lasagne*), now he fancies himself a bit of dessert. So it's off to the chocolate factory, hopefully **Willy Wonka** is on leave though to cut down on the weirdness. Garf has to find the chicken that lays the chocolate eggs, but first has to ensure that the liquid chocolate runs to various other chickens in the place by re-directing the piping so it all goes the right way. If this sounds bizarre, it is but not in a very interesting way sadly. You wander round, eat a bit of discarded food, occasionally catching a lift or escalator, changing the direction of any pipes you pass, and regularly kicking Odie's canine butt to pass time (*a great animation sequence, which first appeared in his previous adventure*), but it's a rather slow bore on the whole. And it takes forever to get anywhere with it, there's no way a fat ginger cat would have the patience for this.

The last part sees our hero attempting more of U.S. Gold's **Winter Games**. Not the Hot Dog though unfortunately (*easily the funnest one in that compilation*), but just some skating on a frozen lake. He can jump objects and has to negotiate the maze to reach the far side of the lake, where he can end his travails in some way. This part has some pretty decent graphics again, and is enjoyable enough for a while, if you don't mind mazes too much. I still



I don't recall ever seeing Garfield on Ski Sunday (essential '80s Sunday viewing)

Odie looks favourite to snaffle this particular piece o' pizza pie



Here's the control room. So far just one chicken has been unlocked (?)

Garfield persists in going the wrong way and is soon to interface with a shrubbery



couldn't do it, so cheated and resorted to watching Youtube for the end, which looked colourful and confusing. Something to do with waving chickens in the air and sticking a deckchair up your nose.

So three sub-games then, with none particularly standing out in any way, but none of them sucking eggs either. I don't want to judge too harshly, as on the whole it's quite a brave effort to make an action game out of such detailed characters, but the overriding impression is that the arcade-adventure approach is probably more the way to go. Big fat cats just aren't into extreme sports, they're above that kind of thing.

Enough catnapping, onto everyone's favourite beagle, **Snoopy**. Who doesn't look even slightly like a beagle to my eyes, but he sure is cute. Charlie Brown and his adventures always seemed quite different to the usual cartoon stuff we used to get in the '80s. Everyone seemed quite laid-back and relaxed, world-weary even, which gave it its own unique vibe. So would the Speccy be able to convey that unusual sense of humour with this game, which came late on, 8 years after the computer's release?

One of the Spectrum's unsung heroes was the main name behind this game, **Christian Urquhart**. He produced titles throughout the Speccy's lifetime, from *(deep breath)* Transversion in '83, through Hunchback, Eskimo Eddie and Cavelon in '84, Robot Messiah in '85, Action Reflex in '86, Xecutor, Gunrunner and Star Runner in '87, The Bobby Yazz Show, Soldier Of Light and Yeti in '88, Dragon Spirit in '89, then Snoopy and Little Puff to finish off with in 1990. He did his time alright, and his games were nearly all very well received and tended to be highly polished affairs. Apart from **Hunchback**, but we'll let him off that one, I'm sure somebody liked it.

Onto Snoopy then and what's the deal here? Well, it's serious 'cos Charlie Brown's pal Linus has lost his ever-present blanky and it's made him cry. Snoopy has kindly offered to try to find it for him, though why no human could attempt this I don't know. He's only got 45 minutes real time to achieve this task for some reason, so don't go and make a cup of tea at any point during it or you're screwed.

This game has multiple endings according to the inlay, as the blanket can be in 'at least' 2 different places - quite the 'modern' thing eh? I remember when games had just one ending and you never lived to see it. Nowadays each one has 8 or 9, and you nearly always end up with the very worst. I'm looking at you, **Oddworld** games, they really take the biscuit. All that effort and at the end you get abandoned by your mates 'cos you didn't rescue 100% of them. Grrrrrrrrrr.

Snoops can pick up objects and interact with all sorts of characters from the comic strip much in the way his brother from a totally different mother, Garfield did in his first Spectrum caper. This is one game which really does look great just in black and white - you could do a ZX81 version and probably get away with it. The inlay makes great play of this being a 100% interactive animated cartoon, but also claims "When you want Snoopy to do something, just sit back and watch, as the action is fully animated before your eyes!" So I did nothing for a bit, and nothing happened, so that's a load of tosh, but hey.

It's good fun just wandering around and admiring the scenery. You can fire a catapult at things, though not people sadly, throw a beach ball, catch a frog in a jar (*spoiler*) munch various munchables, and it all looks great. Even the slightly slow pace of movement doesn't really matter, as it kinda suits the beagle's laid-back demeanour. There aren't a huge number of screens, so in terms of a point-and-click type challenge, hardened gamers will probably complete it before too long. So it's a little strange that there are two quite different ways to complete it, both relatively short, when it might have made more sense to string them together somehow, and make that the only solution. If you'd shelled out a tenner on the game, you may think similarly.

But this aside, Snoopy is great fun. The graphics couldn't be better on the whole, although if we're being picky, when Snoopy jumps while carrying an object, the object disappears. Colour is strictly monochromatic, but it would look wrong otherwise. And it's very quiet apart from a bizarre little tune on the title screen - nowadays you'd probably expect a continuous tune, but then we're quite spoiled aren't we? Gameplay is straightforward, and this is one of few Speccy games that my kids rather liked to watch, and didn't make any sarky comments about, so that's got to count for something!

Just one major complaint though - no **Woodstock**! This is an outrageous travesty. Maybe the game makers didn't want it to end up being an 18 cert, with his shocking language and all... They probably left it to **C.R.L.** to make a text adventure about him instead, they were all over those X-rated affairs. So sorry mogs, the dogs win this round. But no doubt those nefarious felines have something up their furry sleeves, with which to gain some evil vengeance. Don't be taken in by their cute looks, you just know something's brewing in there... "Don't hurt me, Fluffy!!!! Nooooooooo!!!! Getoffameeeeeee!!!!"

CARTOONESQUE CONCLUSIONS

GARFIELD: A WINTER'S TAIL

63%



SNOOPY

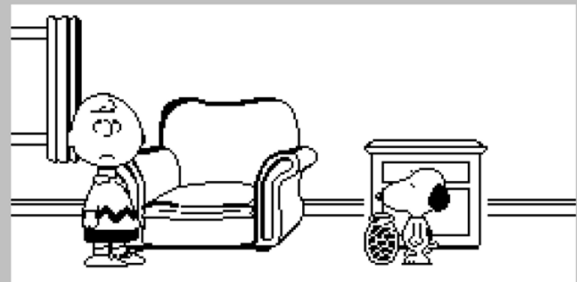
88%





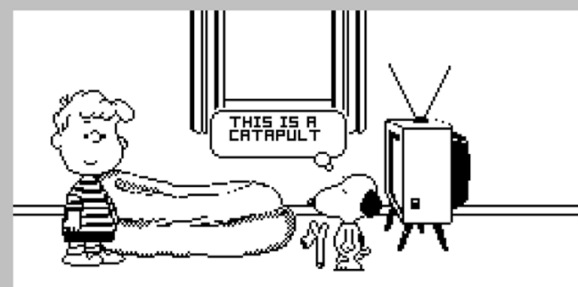
These guys don't really need shades to look cool, they just are

Charlie Brown looks as happy as ever, think I'll yoink his cookies



Snoops launches himself at Patty while a frog in a jar looks on. Normal

Schroeder has dragged himself away from his piano for a change



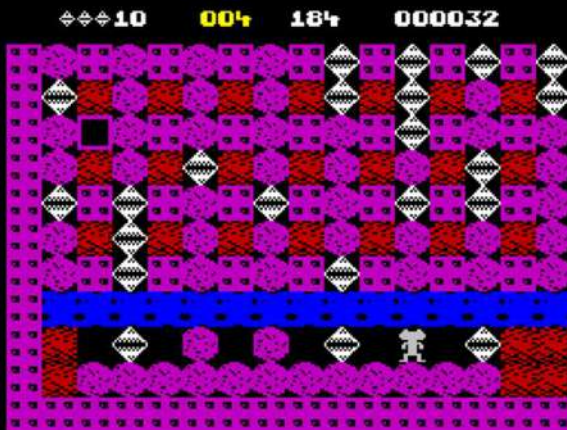


Can we send Boris Johnson underground?
Can we?

"F.F.S." would have been more appropriate
on this level



Rockford turns his back on us in horror,
contemplating this tricky cave



Free the flashy boxes, let them eat the goo,
and run like hell



ROCKFORD'S RIOT (*Monolith, 1985*) &

TOURMALINE (*RetroSouls, 2016*)

Boulder Dash was a funny old game, really quite unique I think. Wonder if it featured in this site's top 100 best Spectrum games list, it's been so long I can't remember. Ah yes, there it is at number 75, good show! Personally I'd probably place it a fair bit higher in my own list, but that one was compiled from a number of sources if memory serves, and other folk obviously had their own opinions on the subject (*philistines*). In terms of playability, it's got to be right up there – an actually playable game on the Spectrum, one you could have a decent go at, not like yer **Loony Jetmans** and **Ghosts 'n' Goblins** of the day. You could even start it from different screens, a rare old luxury the like of which I can't recall at short notice. Did **Manic Miner** let you start the game from whatever screen follows **Solar Power Generator**? No it did not, unless you cheated, which of course you did.

Clearly I like it. So it's quite surprising that I've not played any of the sequels that cropped up over the years, both official and not. Not until an app popped up on my **Firestick** a few years back for an updated version of 'the Dash' to celebrate its 30th anniversary. I paid the requisite few squid and entertained/irritated my kids no end by completing level after level and having more fun than is reasonable. There were all sorts of new features too, none of which I can remember, and trying to use your remote control to play it was a challenge, but overall 'twas reet good.

But even then, only now am I playing the official sequel, **Rockford's Riot**. And that's probably only because I'd had a stab at **Tourmaline**, a modern day B.D. if you like, and thought an old/new comparison might be in order. To start a fight between the generations and cause as much trouble as possible. I've only done this once before and on that occasion **Bonnie And Clyde** pretty much trounced **Bomb Jack 2**, so maybe this one might make for a fairer fight? Let's watch...

Boulder Dash was an American import to these shores, designed by **Peter Liepa**, and marketed by First Star in the US of A. Over here, **Front Runner** released it, not U.S. Gold (*phew*), and the game was later even made into a coin-op, such was its success. Although it seems a bit odd to be playing it in an arcade, but I'd definitely give it a go if I saw one in the local chippy.

After B.D. and R.R. there was an official B.D.3 made in '86, written by a Swedish company, then a B.D. Construction Kit from **Databyte** in 1988. They're the official releases, but since then every man and his dog has had a go at further bouldery exploits, a couple of Russian efforts in '92, then a 'Classic Collection' in 2008, claiming to contain 'all 17 volumes'. The situation had clearly got well out of hand by then, there were way too many **Rockford Files**. Thanks.

Rockford's Riot was released together with the original Boulder Dash, in a move similar to the Bomb Jack 2 release actually, by Beyond Software, but disguised as 'Monolith'. They only released this compilation and one other game, the medieval rubber-band tennis simulator, **Bounces**. Maybe then Beyond decided that Monolith was actually not a terribly good name, and just left people with blank expressions, so they went back to Beyond again. Ho hum.

Starting it up, there's a fairly pointless loading screen with some 'First Star' writing on it, so those few seconds loading that bit up were pretty much wasted, but after a bit we get a menu screen similar to the original's. Only with some pretty duff music, not the cute little tune from B.D. that sometimes gets stuck in my head (*I'm sure you've got your own, if not a few. **Dynamite Dan II's** ditties often live rent-free in my noggin*). Press a key and as a reward you get a pretty rough picture of Rockford himself with an awful Bart Simpson Sunday hairdo. Quick, get it off!

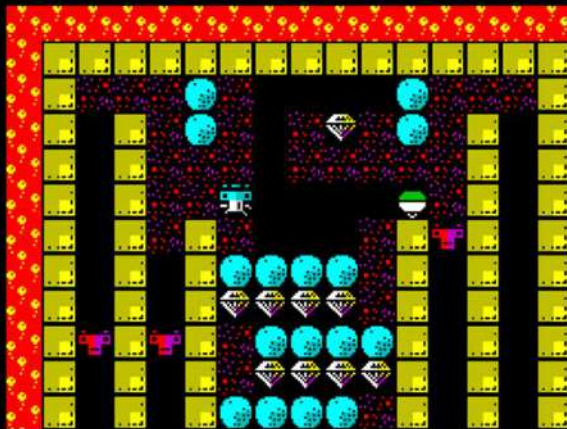
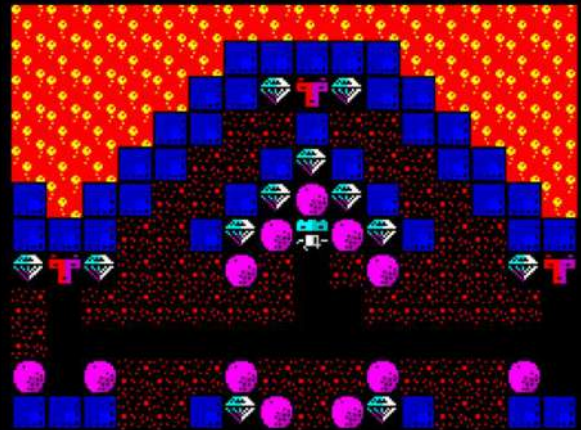
The first level will surely ease us into things, much like the fondly-recalled red and yellow start stage in B.D., before those evil flashy squares took over on level 2. But no, R.R. starts with a real ba***rd hard one, a proper puzzler that will definitely take quite a few attempts to solve. There aren't many diamonds at all, and you have to squish a few evil butterflies to break a wall, which then turns all magical and transfers rocks into gems. But the margins throughout are very, well, marginal and frustration is inevitably your bedfellow. Actually level 2 is even more puzzlier, one of those where green amoebae wibble all over the place and you have to contain them quick before everything turns to sh... sorry rocks, not gems. And on it goes.

So if you play this before ever attempting B.D., you'll probably struggle. However, if you're a bit of an old hand at spelunking (*cough*) then this game is kind of a "**Boulder Dash – The Deeper Dungeons**" experience, following in Gauntlet's footsteps. And as such, if you love to try to get your head around the problems it creates for you, it's great fun. Maybe getting into puzzly type games more just shows how old I'm getting, as recently I've been enjoying the likes of **The Talos Principle** (PS4) and **Portal 2** (PS3), but the Boulder Dash games have a fair old dose of arcade action on top of the mental anguish, which seems to me to be an impressive combination.



*Famous miners: Willy, Monty, Rockford and
Tourmaline guy*

*Not a great time to fall asleep, Rockf... I mean,
Tourmaline guy*



*The game area takes up the entire screen, so
not sure how many lives I've got left...*

*You can push bubbles around to trap these
friendly-looking folk if you're mean*



Crash quite liked R.R., giving it 84% but admitting it was more of a “step sideways” and was “getting a bit long in the tooth”. Even longer now, mateys. While **Sinclair Confuser** grumpily gave it 3/5, mentioning it comes “packaged in a ludicrous vertical box crowned with a luminous disc”. Sounds funky, I can’t find a picture of it sadly. The rarely-read **Your Computer** were impressed to the tune of 5/5, claiming “there is enormous variety, so that each level could almost be described as a separate game”. Wow, well almost, I suppose.

For me, the graphics are perfunctory, the sound is adequate and the colour is trippy as hell on some levels, the programmers not being at all scared to use magenta copiously, so more power to their elbow on that score. But the aesthetics aren’t what these games are about, it’s the playability. And no, the scrolling *STILL* can’t keep up with you, which I’m now thinking is probably a deliberate feature rather than coding shortcomings. But it just adds to the sense of frenzy when you’re trying to get stuff done as the seconds tick away. I enjoyed this one a lot, a worthy sequel to a classic original. *Hurrah!*

“Tourmaline, tourmaline, tourmaline, tourmaleeeeeeeen. I’m begging of you, please don’t take my man” sang the **RetroSouls** crew back in 2016, probably in Russian for they were the mighty **Denis Grachev**, Vasiliy Kostin and Ivan Seleznev. But you’ll almost certainly (*not*) know it from off one of those compilation thingies, “*They Sold A Handful*” (*great title though*) released three years later by Bumfun (*oh god*). A strange compilation indeed as it otherwise featured Dead Flesh Boy, Phaeton and... **Saboteur!** Whaaaaaa... All for £20. Whaaaaaa again...

RetroSouls need no introduction, so here’s one anyway. Well more of a list of the games they’ve made, which works well if you sing it to **Billy Joel’s** “*We Didn’t Start The Fire*”. Y’all ready for this? “*Alter Ego, Gravibots, Dreamwalker, Multitude, Gluf, Lirus, Old Tower, Tiny Dungeons. SIP, Sector, Twinlight, Yazzie, Join, Sector Invasion...*” well it falls apart there, but it was fairly convincing for a little while.

Tourmaline is a crystalline silicate mineral group in which boron is compounded with elements such as aluminium, iron, magnesium, sodium, lithium or potassium, and comes in a wide variety of colours. That’s either fascinating or very ‘boron’ indeed, depending on your outlook. I thought they were kind of green myself, but what do I know? Needless to say, they’re worth a pretty penny (*or perhaps not*) so they must be worth risking life and limb for.

We are warned that, nice and shiny though these torremolinoses might be, if you want to nab them for yourself, you have to endure the ire of the cave-dwelling denizens “in these long-forgotten profound depths” who “live by the light of the tourmaline”. So basically you’re committing genocide if you go and deprive them of what keeps them alive, great. I never saw Rockford as being one of history’s most evil people, but now I’m beginning to wonder... You’re going in strong as you’ve got a stack of bombs and an anti-grav backpack, in addition to your trusty rusty shovel.

Unlike **Boulder Dash** and its offspring, in order to progress on each level, every single gem must be snaffled. And frequently gems are hidden inside the cave creatures, so you have to explode them out of them (*urgh*). So collect and kill everything is the order of the day. Your infinite supply of bombs is reet handy, as they blow up an area of 3x3 squares – the trick is to anticipate the enemies’ movement patterns, which often proves tricky. Dropping rocks on them is another viable alternative when it comes to smiting creatures you don’t like the look of.

There are a lot of screens, which change colour every few levels, together with the jolly nice AY soundtrack. Gameplay is like a cross between Boulder Dash and the **Bomberman** games, which I’ve never taken to, but it’s hard to deny that explosives often come in useful, and you’ll be chucking them everywhere before long, blowing yourself up plenty along the way. You get a few ‘continues’ but not an infinite number, so don’t get too carried away, or back to the beginning thou wilt go.

Lookwise I suppose there’s not an awful lot you can do with the basic Boulder Dash formula, and this game doesn’t look better than the original, in fact I’d say it loses something as the newer ‘Rockford’ if you like isn’t nearly as characterful and weirdly cute as the original. Maybe they could have made it a different creature instead? It’s all very colourful and sonorous though in typical **RetroSouls** fashion.

And as for gameplay, well it’s pretty good but again it somehow seems a bit less fun than the older titles. Maybe it’s not entirely fair to play Tourmaline at the same time as reigniting my interest in B.D. & R.R., as it’s possibly likely to suffer by comparison. Even so, it’s well worth a go, if only to show off that you know a new word and you’re not afraid to use it in everyday conversation. But on this occasion, I reckon old rock edges out the new-fangled stuff you hear on the radio these days.

ROCKY RATINGS

ROCKFORD'S RIOT

88%

TOURMALINE

81%



DAN DARE 3: THE ESCAPE

(Virgin Games, 1990)

"Me, I'm sold on Dan and the Mekon" was one of my many mis-heard lyrics from the music world, this one from the Sisters Of Mercy tune **Dr. Jeep**. I'm sure nobody's too interested, but when I checked just now it seems Mr. Eldritch was referring to the Mekong river, not Daniel Dare's eternal green nemesis. And all these years I've thought he was a big fan of the Eagle. It's not quite as well-known as **Jimi Hendrix's** "Excuse me while I kiss this guy" example admittedly. What a way to start this review, things can only go downhill from here...

I mentioned recently about Christian Urquhart being a bit of an unsung Spectrum hero, responsible for many decent games, and here's another that might not spring to mind as readily as the Stampers, Ceccos and Singletons of this world. **David Perry**, often accompanied by **Nick Bruty**. Who dey den? Let's have a run-down of their CVs and see if they get the job.

David Perry was a one-man band to start with, mostly making games for **Mikrogen**. He made Herbert's Dummy Run, Three Weeks In Paradise, Stainless Steel, then Equinox with a certain **Rafaella Cecco** interestingly. He then produced the odd but colourful Great Gurianos, but really hit his groove when he met and fell in love with Nick Bruty. Not really, although I don't know for sure, but in the Spectrum world they became inseparable thereafter.

They both worked on **Savage** together with 23 more people, then just the pair of them produced Tintin On The Moon, Dan Dare 3, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Extreme, Smash TV, Captain Planet and finally Paperboy 2. Jeez, where did these programmers of old find the time to go to the toilet even? Some top titles among all these then, so the Perry/Bruty combo was certainly one to be reckoned with.

I've plumped for **Dan Dare 3** and Extreme to have a butchers at, since they look the most interesting of a pretty interesting bunch. First chronologically came the Eagle's favourite son, Colonel Daniel McGregor Dare III. Or rather this was his third adventure on our fave little micro machine. The first met with widespread approval, while the second was seen as being a bit of a disappointment by comparison, possibly something to do with the trickiness of controlling Dan's little dinky spaceship if I recall correctly. Did the third part claw back some of the franchise's respectability, fishermen wondered with baited breath and tender hooks? Well yeah but I'll write this review pretending we don't know until the end of it, so don't tell anyone.

ZX Spectrum – It Lives!!! can exclusively report that Spectrum Computing exclusively tells us that Retro Gamer had an exclusive scoop on Dan Dare 3, which related to a Computer & Video Games exclusive at the time. Namely that it was originally going to be "**Crazy Jet Racer**" by Probe Software, and C&VG even had some screenshots with a different main sprite, but with everything else looking the same. So Virgin must have swooped in with their D.D. licence and bought it up. It's fair enough, I'm sure they paid the programmers handsomely for having to go back into the code and re-do large parts of it, though I bet they gnashed their teeth more than a little for a time.

The mean, green alieeen **The Mekon** has been at it again. He's managed to capture Mr. Dare with the intent of experimenting on him to make a mutated army to do his bidding (*in intergalactic auctions*). His Treens are pretty ugly, so he's hoping for an attractiveness upgrade by mixing Dan's DNA in with them. But, canny chap that he always is, Dan the Man has managed to escape the green one's clutches. He's located a spaceship that could take him back to Earth, but wouldn't you know it, it's out of gas. He reckons it will take 50 pounds of high-grade rocket



"Mr. Dare, are you trying to seduce me?"

POW! Take that, you purple... horny thing, you



"Do you mind earthling, I'm trying to take a dump here"

Dan can hardly contain his glee as he finds a gun even bigger than he is



fuel, the really tasty stuff, to fill 'er up, so he dons his ACG jetpac(k) and flies off to try to get some. Fuel, that is.

The loading screen is all very nice, but it looks like Dan has been caught out dressing as Danielle for the weekend, as he's got some gorgeous bright red lippy on him and he's all pouty, giving the Mekon a '*come hither*' look. Or maybe I've read too much into it. Anyway, on load-up we get a strangely jaunty tune on the menu screen, not at all spacey. To me it sounds like that Motown classic "*Sugar Pie Honeybunch, you know that I love you*", which I'm sure is its proper title. Odd, but it sounds nice enough.

Once you press fire to start, a million blocks of colour go exploding over your shoulders, so you know what to expect right from the off. It's one of those games for whom colour clash holds no fears, they just go right ahead and spray rainbows every which way, and it ends up looking amazing. Dan himself has his jetpack on his back (*Val de ri, val de ra*) and bizarrely he's kinda half yellow and half green, like he plays for **Norwich City**. Colourful and annoying aliens fly around, intent on sapping his health, which is shown on a big red bar on the far right of the screen, not on the big old status panel at the top, which threw me for a while.

In every section that pesky Mekon lies in wait, holding onto a security pass granting access to the next level. So you have to unload as much ammo as you can into his green bulbous head, then he teleports elsewhere, dropping the pass. Once you've zapped him, you also get to play on his home computer terminal and delete his high scores. These devices allow Dan a number of handy boons (*yes, I said boons*). He can buy a smart bomb which destroys everyone on the screen bar himself, 10 bouncing bombs which fly around until they meet something, top up his ammo, buy extra lives, and once he's got all his fuel topped up, blast off for Earth.

When he tries to access a new level, our hero is suddenly shown falling through space and time in a quite alarming manner. As he drops, he must line up correctly with the series of boxes (*about 20 I'd say*) otherwise his various particles don't make it to the end all together, which ain't nice. This part reminds me slightly of those hideous '*between levels*' bits in **Avalon** and **Dragontorc**, where you always lose health, especially if a massive spider lands on you. Only this version is a bit easier, but you do tend to miss the odd box, or I do at least.

You can go back to top up your various weapons and lives whenever you like as long as you've got enough credits, which is rather a helpful feature and prolongs game length considerably. It's tough, but seems doable with a decent amount of practice, which can't be said for most Spectrum games. And knowing what weapon will work best when is a key element, as well as not frittering your ammo away too quickly on the first ugly alien you clap your eyes on.

Graphicswise, DD3 looks extraordinary. Things move around so quickly considering the complexity and colour overload of all the game sprites, and it's a fantastic advert for the computer's capabilities. It's pretty playable too, and is a great game to have a quick blast on and feel smug that you're not a Commodore 64 owner. All the mags of the time loved it, giving it the big scores, apart from **The Games Machine**, whoever they were, who said it merited 80%. Ah well, can't beat them all.

SPACED-OUT SCORE

DAN DARE 3: THE ESCAPE

91%





Be like Buzz Lightyear and "fall with style" for all you're worth

Cor it's getting messy round here, a smart bomb might have been the better choice



The Mekon bought these guns second-hand from Exolon and they still work pretty well



Dan must shoot this alien to gain some leverage in his intergalactic negotiations



EXTREME

(Digital Integration, 1991)

Enough Dare-ing do, are you ready to get EXTREME!!!! Huuuurrrrggghhh, feel the burn! This game better be good if it's declaring itself as EXTREME! It's quite a statement of intent really, which reminds me of '80s rock band EXTREME! The problem I had with the band EXTREME was the fact that they didn't seem even slightly EXTREME at all, especially their big hit, the sappy "*More Than Words*". That was about as EXTREME as one of yer gran's tea towels. Ridiculous. So who in Spectral terms would be the most likely software house to make a game with such an EXTREME title? Surely one of the brash, unapologetic outfits like Elite, U.S. Gold or even Ocean/Imagine (*depending on what day it was*). Nope, it's Digital Integration. Hang on, that just sounds wrong, let's look into their EXTREME history a minute.

After the jaunty **Taxi!** and the riveting **Football League Analysis**, '83 saw D.I. hit the Speccy simulation scene hard with **Fighter Pilot** and **Night Gunner**, both getting rave reviews from the sort of people who would like **Fighter Pilot** and **Night Gunner**. In 1984 they did literally nothing, but '85 saw another successful flight sim, **Tomahawk**. For the next two years they veered (*pitched?*) away from planes with the perma-delayed **T.T. Racer** and the chilly **Bobsleigh**. **A.T.F.**, a more arcadey flyer was a hit in '88, then things went quiet until 1991 which gave us **F-16** **Fighter Pilot** and... this game. Which is about as incongruous as Code Masters releasing a spreadsheet package you could do your home finances on.

Being done by the [Perry/Bruty](#) powerhouse team, it was hardly likely to be a dull, green and blue flight sim, it's true. Quite the polar opposite. And the title too suggested that a knowledge of yawing and ailerons might not necessarily be required to play this game. I'd love to know how it ended up being a Digital Integration title, maybe someone can look into this for me? Thanks.

Well, to start with, I have to confess that the lovely picture on the front of the box is indeed pretty darn EXTREME, if highly bizarre and homo-erotic. Though in those days an awful lot of Speccky heroes were half naked muscle-bound dudes on reflection, easily outnumbering the risqué ladies that popped up here and there. This fella's half man, half machine it seems, in a fairly impractical set-up but there's no doubting the EXTREMITY of it. And on the loading screen he's even bright red into the bargain, sending the EXTREMITY levels off the richter scale!

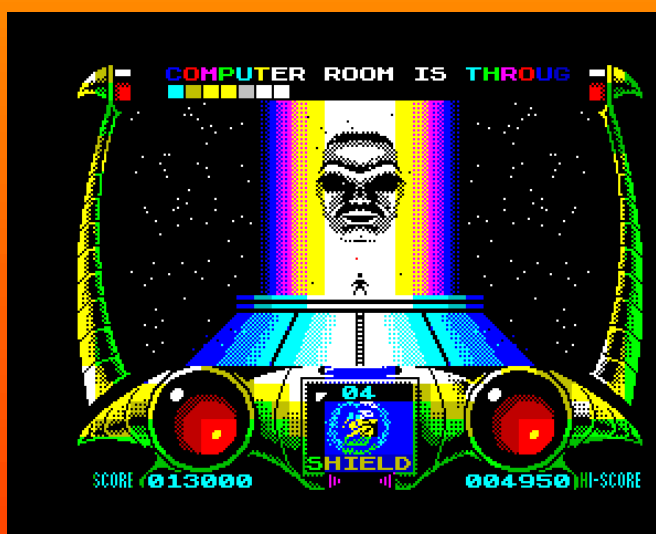
Is the plot EXTREME? And more importantly, is it about time I dropped the whole capital letters joke as it's getting wearisome? Yes. Well, in December 1973 (*when I was but 6 months old*) some space doofuses aboard the Pioneer 10 craft passed Jupiter never to be seen again, but they helpfully had information onboard telling any bored aliens about Earth's whereabouts and its squishy population. So in the year 3021 (*guess they took a while to sort their packed lunch out*) an alien ship crashes on Earth, and it's set to self-destruct and blow the planet to smithereens unless it's disabled. It's your job to deal with this sticky situation. EXTREMELY quickly (*sorry*).

Once the game has loaded and the bright red man-machine has disappeared, he's replaced with a grounded flying saucer framed by an outlandish status panel area flying up both sides of the screen. A really very nice digitised tune plays, which sounds suitably sci-fi unlike DD3's **Four Tops** cover version. Press a button after a few minutes of aural delight, then the menu screen appears, very white unexpectedly. I'm not sure this is the optimal choice of background colour, as it vaguely resembles the Speccy 128 start screen. Never mind, once you begin a big head starts talking to you disturbingly, which transpires to be the ship's computer giving you your mission details. You stand below it, looking comically like a plodgy stick man. Unheroic. Mission numero uno is to retrieve the ship's energy crystal from its lower decks and put it back in its display



When stormtroopers mate with AT-STs, things get ugly

"Mr. Extreme, I regret to inform you that you have failed your space driving test"



Sandy White is having another bad dream about I Of The Mask

"Fly, my pretty Segway air force, fly"



cabinet. Easy eh? Erm, really no. Your guy is aboard a kind of futuristic segway device for this bit, and as you start you're positioned in a teleporter-looking area as your ammo level fills itself up for a few seconds. It's a bit like waiting for a pit-stop, but once you're full and you press fire, the most amazing colourful plume of flame shoots out from your gun, and you know that you're once again in the mighty presence of the Perry and the Bruty. Gawd bless those guys.

Your health this time is shown by colourful blocks at the top of the screen, not the actual number in the middle as you might at first think. These guys like to confuse us. Move your fella right and you soon realise you can't get far, but there are plenty of quite irritating little aliens to keep you company at least. So try left instead and you find a miniature flying saucer type alien and a button. Press the alien and avoid the button (?) which has presumably done something somewhere. You wait expectantly. Time passes. There's a load of red bubbling lava below you, but it doesn't look inviting. More time passes.

Okay, I'm not getting this, I need professional help. So time to check a walkthrough. Ah right, you have to hang around above the lava for quite some time actually, then a you-sized moving black gap appears below, which you have to dive into, then move rightwards through the lava until you reach safety. Which isn't bloody easy when you can't hover as such, you have to keep stabbing the up key, constantly jiggling up and down trying desperately to stay in the black and out of the red (*Bullseye ref. there*). I suspect many people's gaming experience might have ended prematurely here. Well I guess I was warned about the extremity of the task at hand...

Next you must lasso the crystal with your space lasso, then try to drag it back to the start screen like you're in *Thrust II*. It has its own little narrow passageways to be guided through, and you have to keep it close company as it ambles back to its rightful place while you take all sorts of damage from lava and nasties generally. After saving my game state so very many times, I did manage to guide it to its destination, but boy was it hard going and there's no way I'd have been able to do it 'properly'. The enemies tend to keep coming and your ammo level tends to run out, so tactics do come into it. Extreme tactics.

On completion of level 1, the big head gives you your next briefing, and I was fairly amazed to find that you are then confronted by a different game type. You have to swim through hazardous fuel tanks in a great big steampunk diving suit to retrieve a key while avoiding nippy fish, which you can blow up by setting off strategically places mines, of which there are not quite enough around to make things comfortable. This is a fun section which seems like it should be simple, but ends up not a walkover (*swimover?*) at all. The number of times I so very nearly did this but just fell short was, well, extreme I guess. It's good though, light relief compared to the first bit.

So I had to resort to *Youtube* again to see what happens on level 3, and I can confirm that it's off the charts in insanity and extremity. Your guy has to don an exo-skeleton for the final showdown, a bit like what he is poncing around wearing on the inlay. He wanders along in this ridiculously huge get-up, frazzling everything in front of him, until he eventually destroys the computer terminal at the end. It looks very un-strategic from what I can see, but undeniably fun.

Then it's probably job done, and if you manage to do it, I'd say you probably merit the title of *Extreme Gamer 3000*. I suppose that if there are only the three levels, things have to be pretty tough going, otherwise it would all be over too soon. But despite the difficulty level, Extreme is still an impressive experience, absolutely choc-ful of the pair's incredibly colourful graphics and for once, this is a product that really does live up to its extravagant name.

EXTREME RATING

EXTREME

85%





Here's the fun lava bit. 57th time's a charm

Life goal: riding a segway while firing a flamethrower. Hells yeah!



On soggy stage 2, these mines are your friends and the fish aren't at all

And if you get this far, you're even more EXTREME than Nuno Bettencourt



20 MODS, CLONES & RE-CRACKS,

PART 2



RENEGADE 2-IN-1

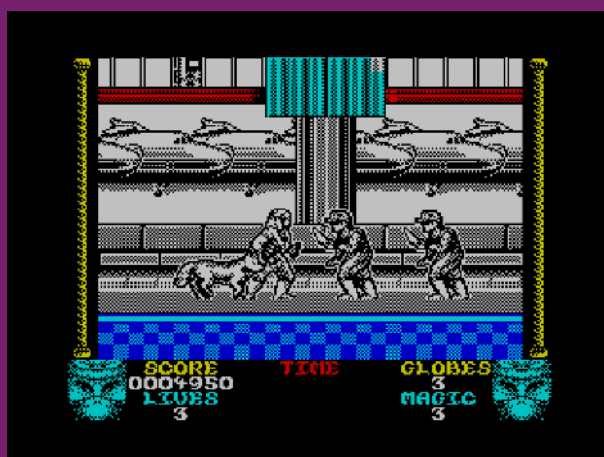
(Imagine, 1987 & Goodboy/Tiboh, 2022)

Now here's a game that we all must have played back in the day, specifically the days of 1987 when it came out. **Imagine** did such a good job with its Target; sequel, and such a bad job with its threequel, that the original is in danger of getting slightly overlooked. But 4 likely characters by the names of **Goodboy** (*woof woof*), **Tiboh**, **Intense** and **Ralf** certainly haven't overlooked it. No siree, a couple of years ago they thought they'd jazz it up, give it a remix, mash it up and see what came out. And the result is Renegade 2-in-1, which I think just means you can play it the original way or the rejigged way.

Renegade's plot is pretty much the storyline of every macho '80s movie ever. You have to get your girl back by fighting the many street gangs of New York/Gotham/Birkenhead, through a subway, a pier, the red light district and some lovely back alleys. You can't use weapons, it's just not your thing, so you have to kick, punch, jump and throw people around in order to disperse the crowds. Not having played this in quite a while, I forgot just how *little* space you get to operate in. The gangs seriously hem you in and one false move and they're on top of you from every possible direction. Tricky stuff.

This mod adds quite a bit of new stuff. There are 2 impressive new load screens, some great music borrowed from the Atari ST version apparently, and everything has been re-coloured to the max, in a way that resembles modern equivalents such as **Mighty Final Fight**. It's a worthy overhaul for an old classic which is well worth having another crack at, even if the action is a bit claustrophobic by modern standards.





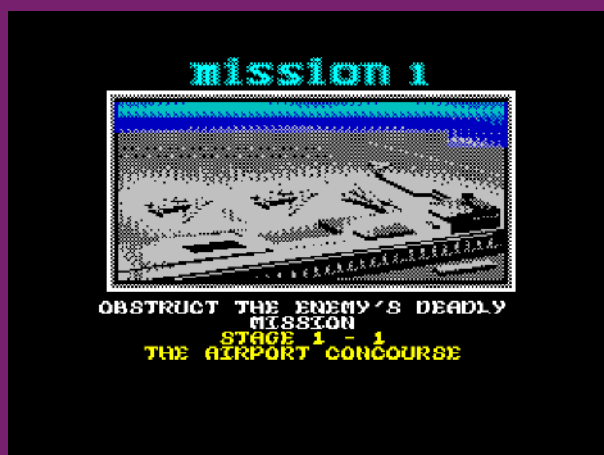
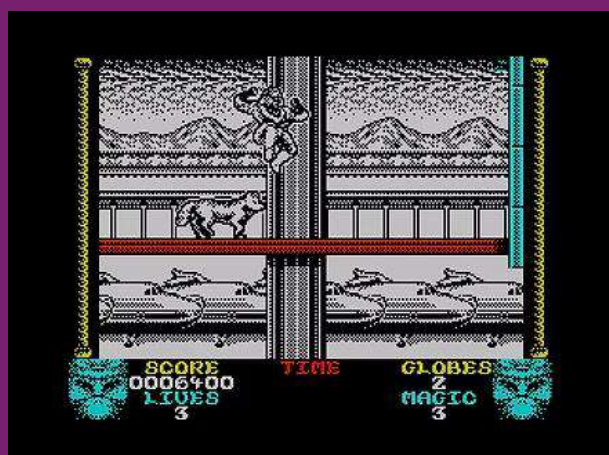
SHADOW DANCER 128K

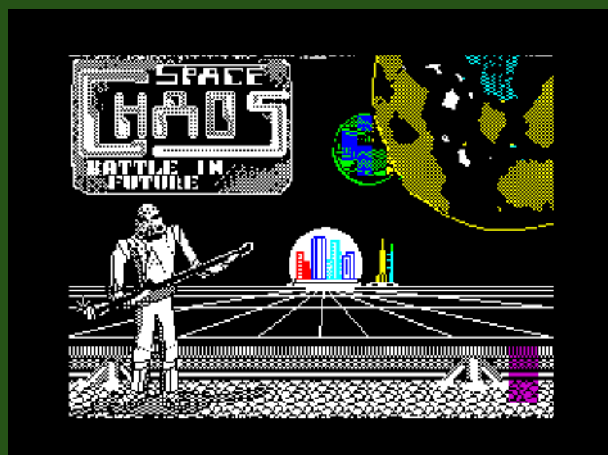
(U.S. Gold, 1991 & Tiboh/Monsters, 2022)

Okay, this is definitely a new one on me, sounds a bit like [Midnight Ballet Dancing Simulator](#), could be quite original. Ah, no it's ninjas again, well no matter. [U.S. Gold](#) brought this out in 1991, so a lot of people might have tuned out of the Speccy scene by that point, me included. Oh and it's a coin-op conversion, how very unexpected of our American friends! Ah well, enough cynicism, let's see what on earth it's all about then.

You're [Joe Mushashi](#) (*they picked that name?*) who has to stop a load of terrorists from blowing up his locality by attacking them with shurikens, while impressively also taking his dog out for a walk. There can't be many games where you have to fight the forces of evil while keeping man's best friend exercised too. The action is pretty darn slow really, but benefits from being sped up with an emulator, and the graphics are very nice and large. Fair to say it's standard arcade fare on the whole, but nothing too extraordinary.

So what was new in '22? Well someone has coloured in the original loading screen very nicely indeed (*U.S. Gold forgot to do that, doh*) and there is now some pretty good music accompanying the (rather pedestrian) action, so that's nice. And you also get a little mission briefing at the start of levels, which was apparently a [Commodore 64](#) thing. Spit, spit. I suppose we have to give them the odd bit of credit now and again.





SPACE CHAOS: BATTLE IN FUTURE

(Games Workshop, 1985 & Blindmouse)

It's surprising there aren't more mods of **Julian Gollop's** classic **Chaos**, but this seems to be the only one I could find. It's taking Chaos into the future and making it all spacey like, much like **Rebelstar**. But would it have Ratface Flanagan and photons in it? And servo droids mowing the lawn. And the ability to eat coffee tokens. And insane opportunity fire shoot-outs in narrow corridors. The answer is no, because they're in **Rebelstar**, not **Chaos**, silly reviewer.

The basic game is the same, but all of the old spells have been chucked out, and shiny new ones installed in their place. Instead of **Dungeons & Dragons** type creatures, we now have a whole host of obscure robots, although I think we all know **C3PO** and **R2D2**. There's (*deep breath*) Space Sword, Starbase, Fire Bolt, B7 Drone, Space Flaps (!), Stepper, Vampire (?), Space Bow, Silver Killer, Alpha, Cent-B, DR-1, Com, Des-2, S-Clive, Monster, Space Shield, Terminal, CM-1, Killer, Dark Monster, Space Station, Boss, Moon Base, 'Nothing'. Christ knows what most of those are...

It's an interesting proposition, this. But I think it's lacking some of the more unpredictable spells from the original, such as **Gooney Blob**, **Magic Fire**, **Magic Wood** and **Shadow Wood**. Without these the landscape is rather too bare. I think if one were to do a mod of such a game, one might be best keeping most, if not all, of the features of the original, and incorporating new ones on top. But then again, is it really wise to tinker with a classic?

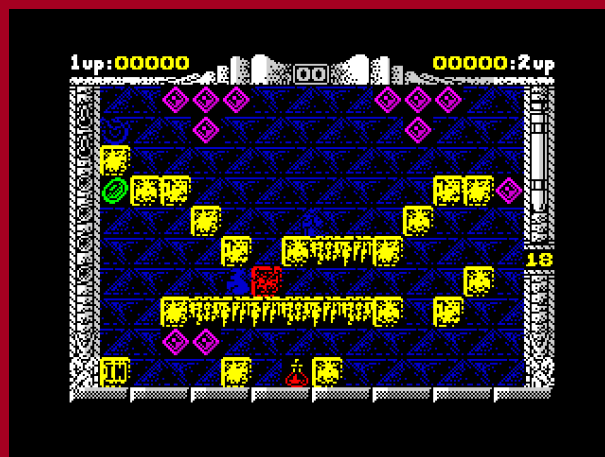


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al'S SPELLS
A-DISBELIEVE
C+SPACE SWORD
E*ENERGY U.
G-B7 DRONE
I-B7 DRONE
K*DEFEND
M-FIRE BOLT
O-SUBVERSION

B+DES-2
D-SUBVERSION
F-FIRE BOLT
H*STARBASE
J*ENERGY U.
L*D.WING
N*C3PO

PRESS '0' TO RETURN TO MAIN MENU
  
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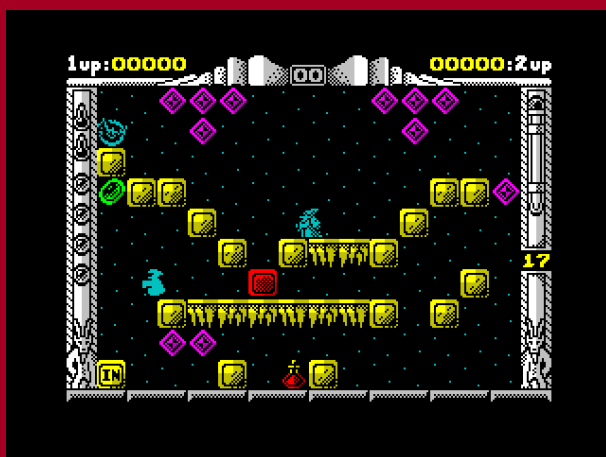
SPHERICAL REMASTERED

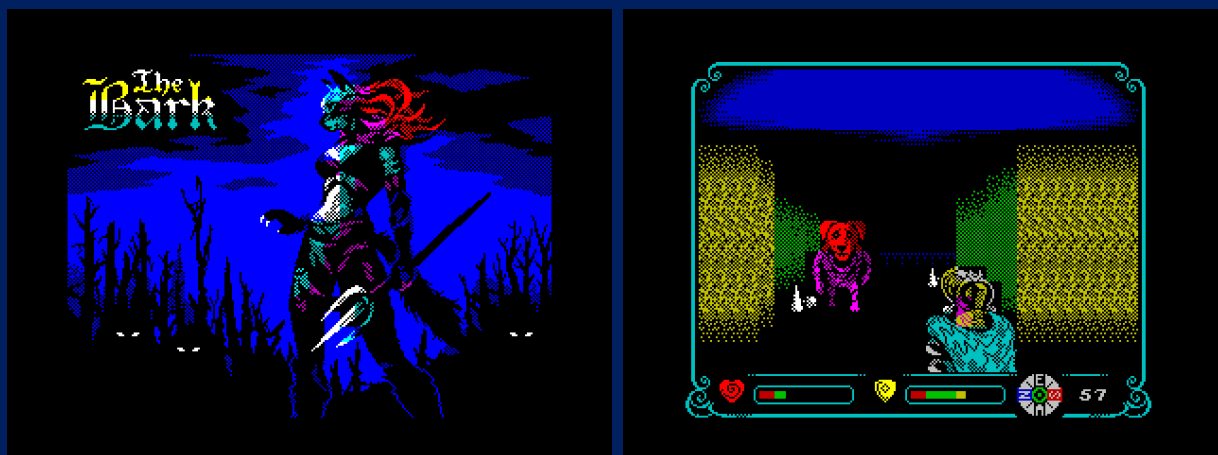
(Rainbow Arts, 1989 & Rafal Miazga, 2016)

I don't recall this game for some reason, but it was released in 1989 by **Rainbow Arts**, who are probably most famous in Spectral circles for not quite releasing **The Great Giana Sisters**. It got some rave reviews too, including a Crash Smash with 90%. And more recently it's been one of many which has received **Rafal Miazga's** remastering / reimagining / recolouring / remusicaling / reloadingscreening treatment. So what's it all about then?

There's a massive introductory story in typically fantastical prose. I need the cheat notes really, so let's check out the back of the inlay. You're a wizard (*Harry*) and must use your skills of magic (*sorted*) and logic (*oh*) to guide a sphere to its goal by filling gaps in with blocks. There are over 200 levels, and even a simultaneous 2 player mode, a real rarity in a puzzle game. It reminds me of the more recent **Fire 'N' Ice**, which was probably inspired by this title.

This is quite a cool game, pretty addictive and enjoyable as you progress through the levels. So what has **Mr. Miyagi**, sorry Miazga, done to it himself? Well this is a funny one, as he appears I think to have made the backgrounds a bit more minimalist. They're rather over-busy on the original unusually so the revised version seems a bit easier on the eye. There's a very nice tune playing, I think that's a new thing. And there's a new dodgy loading screen, but otherwise it's all good, both old and new.





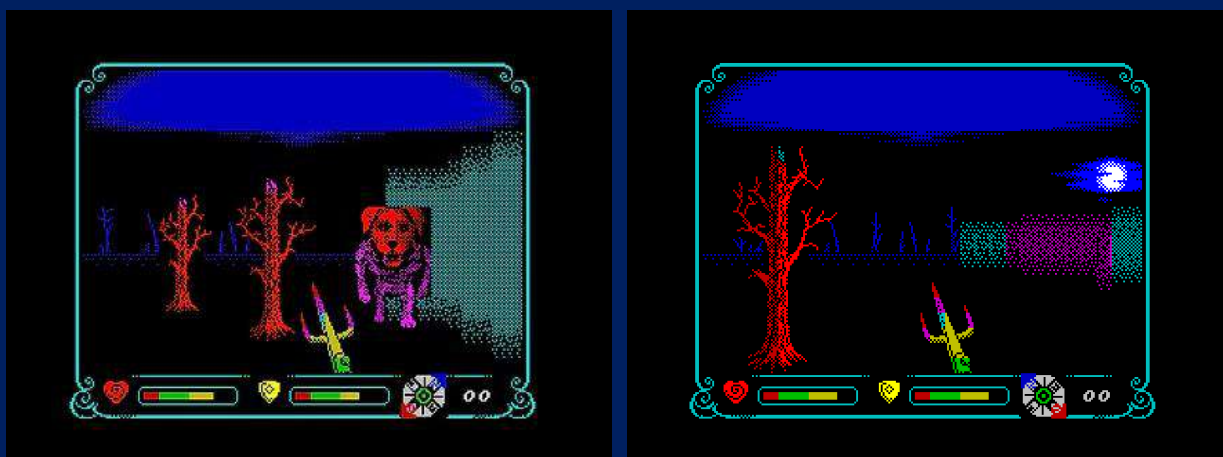
THE BARK

(Oleg Origin, 1997 & Zosya, 2023)

I've only just reviewed **The Dark** and its upgrades and variations, when along comes The Bark. The Dark with dogs. How strange. This is apparently a mod of **The Dark: The Lost Pages** actually, which starts off 2D, then goes 3D if you get that far, which I didn't. Apparently the levels are the same as on that game, only with more canine graphics.

You play a cat, which seems more interesting to me since I'm more of a cat person myself. Your name isn't Miss Tinkerbelle, but Xandra and very stereotypically you seem to want to fight a load of dogs, but probably only the little yappy ones. But you have weapons available, which must be most cats' dream scenario. Level 1 sees you in a big open area trying to find a key to get out, which took me in my crapness a *lot* of goes. Then on level 2 you have to murder a dragon. So it's all good fun really.

I think the main point of this might be to show off those levels from The Lost Pages which were so very hard to get to, but to present them in a slightly different way. And obviously someone thought of the title and worked back from there! It's a novel idea, but could you really see many old games getting a doggy makeover? **Woof Justice**, **Bark Sceptre**, **Ma-Dogs**. Instead of Mazogs, you see? Not sure it'll catch on.





THE HOBBIT 128

(Melbourne House, 1982 & Kayamon, 2015)

Once upon a time there lived a hobbit, then there was a **Boggit**. And **Melbourne House** told his story a long time ago, and very good it was too. Although if one was to be critical, a lot of the screens took their sweet time using the FILL command before their full picture was revealed. This caused minor consternation in some quarters, but wasn't really a major issue as these pictures were considered quite impressive in those very early days.

But in 2015 a group of Spectrum programmers thought they could do better. So they produced a 128K version of the old classic, but complete with some very nice images indeed. The game itself is unchanged, presumably with entertaining bugs and everything, but the visuals are dramatically different. There's also a very lovely new loading screen to enjoy into the bargain.

You'd have to say this is a wholly successful execution, the new pictures really do add hugely to the ambience. I wonder what other adventures could have their graphics tarted up a bit... **Level 9** ones would benefit from do-overs I think, since when they did eventually do graphics, they weren't the best. And surely someone could make some really nice pics to accompany the original **Adventure**, or **Colossal Caves**, or **Classic Adventure**, depending on your preference. I'd do it myself but I'm busy that day.





THE PERILS OF WILLY

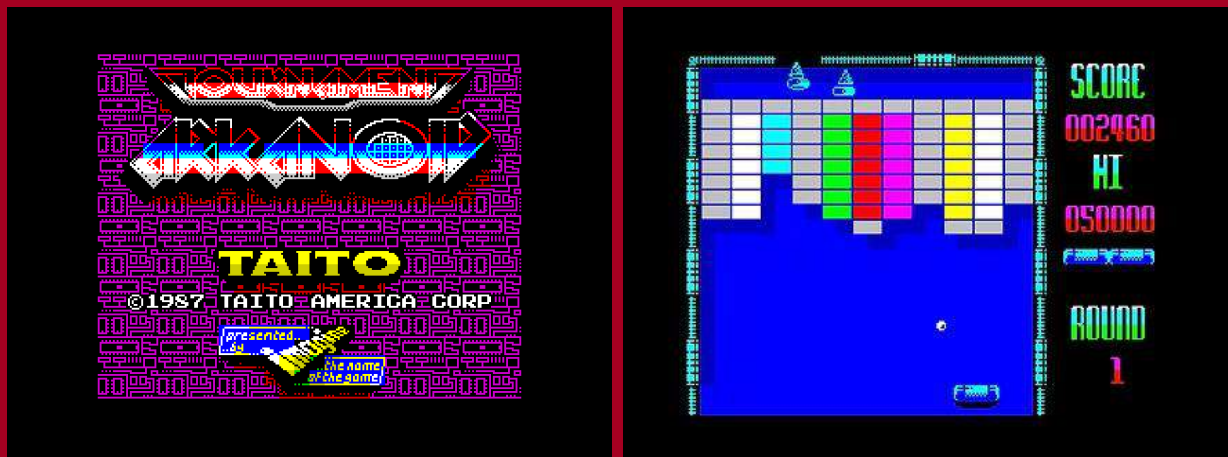
(Software Projects, 1984 & Allan Turvey, 2020)

There have been one or two MM/JSW clones over the years haven't there? Geoff Neil's played them all, and good for him, but I've tried the odd one and generally found them to be fairly pale imitations. But this one is a tad different, it's a conversion of a game that was released on the 'mighty' VIC-20 between the releases of Manic Miner and 'Jetpac' Willy. Spectrum owners must have moved on by that point, but maybe the poor VIC-20philes were not so lucky.

This time round Willy's been off on a bender and he has to make his drunken way home. So I wonder if this is what happened right before JSW then – little does he know what Maria has in store for him... Anyway, he has to go through parks avoiding ducks, negotiate railway stations avoiding trains, and collect music notes along the way as you do. There are 33 screens in the original, and Mr. Turvey has recreated them all here, like the good 'un that he is.

The screen is squashed a bit in translation from Commodore's best machine before the Amiga (ooh bitchy), but it still looks grand. Plenty of colour and manic sprites abound, trundling and spinning around the place a treat. It's lovely to play a 'proper' mod of those famous games, and everything seems very authentic, it sure takes you back. The *piece de resistance* is a couple of Led Zep tunes in there too, I guess it's Willy's fave air guitar music when he's off his head.





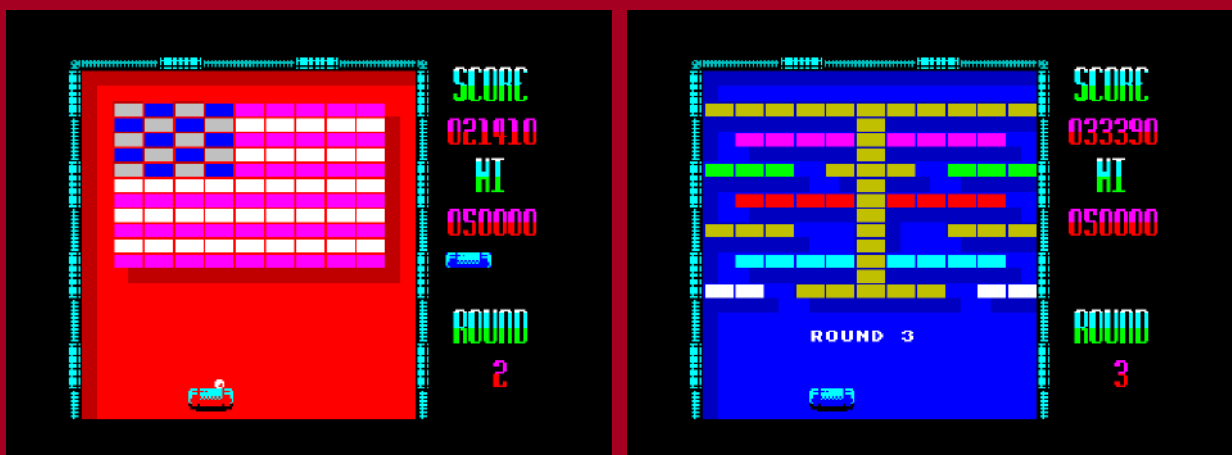
TOURNAMENT ARKANOID

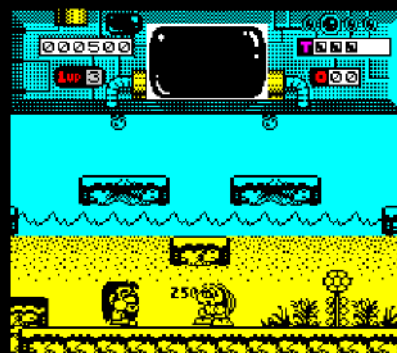
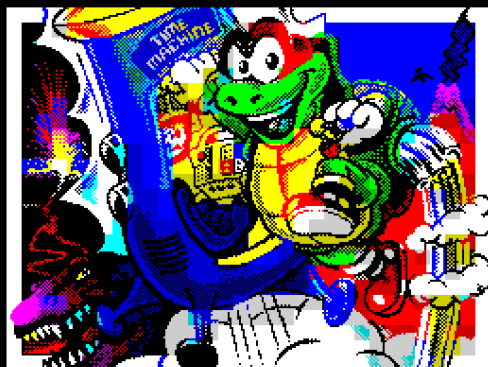
(Imagine, 1987 & Bentley/Carroll, 2022)

Back in 1987, in between the release of **Arkanoid** and its sequel, the Revenge of Homer Simpson (*sorry*) there was another Skywalker, I mean Arkanoid game released in the arcades, but only in the US of A. It was called **Tournament Arkanoid** and it was hard as nails, only for absolute meatheads. Quite why anyone would play Arkanoid and think it was far too easy is beyond me, but I guess either it was deemed as such by some, or (*Po*)Taito just fancied wringing more coins out of kids' pockets. I apologise for the poor quality of puns in this paragraph, but if I have to suffer, you do too.

What was the story behind Arkanoid anyway? Well, a mothership called Arkanoid was destroyed but a spacecraft called **Vaus** managed to escape the carnage. It's the Dimension Changer's fault, so you have to destroy him, once you've got through his 32 layers of protective brick, then reverse time and restore the mothership. But don't reverse it too much or you'll undo the entire history of the universe, so care is required.

These 2 guys used an Arkanoid editor to make this, trying to make it as close to the obscure arcade title as they could. So screen 1 resembles the original game's screen 1, only most of the bricks need hitting multiple times in order to get rid of them. And on it goes into further tortuous levels. It's all a bit too much to me, I need my games made childishly simplistic really, not even more ba\$tard hard! It's almost as bad as the second level of **Batty...**





TURBO THE TORTOISE: 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

(Hi-Tec, 1992 & Bentley/Tiboh/Goodboy, 2022)

Here's another walk in the park from **Goodboy** and his mates, this time giving Hi-Tec's very late budget title from 1992 a 30th birthday makeover. It seems that **Hi-Tec** did some good work at the latter end of the Spectrum's lifetime, it's just a darn shame they didn't start 10 years earlier. The game actually got a re-release from the Masters of Code as well, it could be that they picked it up when Hi-Tec went bust.

Turbo the tortoise was napping in a mad scientist's experimentation chamber when the scientist's deranged assistant accidentally turned it on, and lo, Turbo was embiggened and given super powers. And he wasn't even teenage or a ninja yet. He must travel through 6 different time zones and find the rest of the pieces to complete the doc's prototype, whatever that may entail. He does this in jumpy platformy style, bouncing on enemies' heads and throwing things at them. Like he's **Yoshi** kinda.

I'm quite impressed by this game. Yes, it's a platformer but it is convincingly **Mario**-esque and rather fun to play. The graphics are good if monochrome, and this mod doesn't appear to have added more colour unless I'm mistaken. It's a 128K single load unlike the original, and there's a great new loading screen and some other graphical flourishes. Oh, and the status bar appears at the bottom of the screen rather now rather than the top. What's that all about?





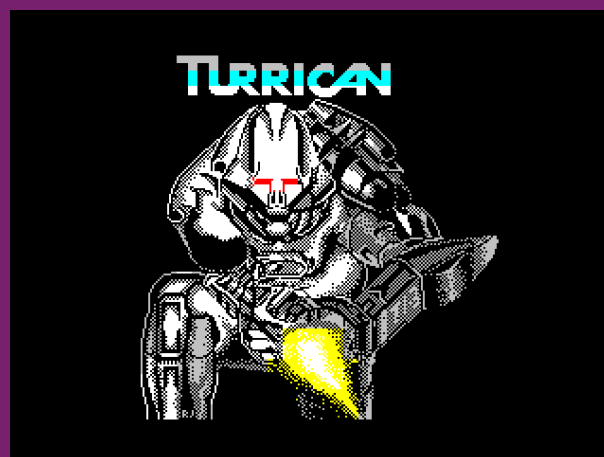
TURRICAN & TURRICAN II (2 IN 1)

(Rainbow Arts, 1990 & Goodboy/Tiboh/Slider, 2021)

Crash and **YS** seemed to love both Turrican games, with **Sinclair User** rating both only in the 70's, percentagewise. They were relative latecomers to the party in '90 and '91 and I wasn't particularly aware of them at the time, and having played them only recently, I admit I'm struggling to see their attraction. But the games market wasn't what it was by then, so perhaps they seemed better, or more likely I've not reached the good bits in them yet.

You've got to destroy the evil **Morgul** (*Tolkein gonna sue*) by travelling through 5 different worlds in the first game. While in the second you have to travel through 5 different worlds to liberate the planet **Landorin** (*George Lucas gonna sue*) from its robotic oppressors. There's a lot of shooting and jumping, and the whole thing looks like a miniaturised version of **Trantor** to me.

Goodboy and **Tiboh** enlisted the help of **Slider** (*no idea*) for this mod and they seem to have given it quite an overhaul. There are new loading screens of course, plus some rather nice introductory scenes and some AY music translated from other machines' versions of the game. And both games have been incorporated into just the one load, hence the title, so if you really do dig Turrican, you'll be in seventh heaven.



- FIN -

